



**THE CORRUPTED
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

GRIM BUSINESS

CONTROLLING CORPORATIONS AND RESTORING DEMOCRACY



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“This is a government of the people,
by the people, and for the people
no longer. It is a government
of corporations, by corporations,
and for corporations.”

RUTHERFORD B. HAYES
U.S. PRESIDENT, 1877–1881



Editorial

Budget Bloodbath By Jessica Clark

“It’s not something we’ve done with a meat axe,” Vice President Dick Cheney told Fox News in defense of the administration’s FY 2006 budget.

Cheney’s words bring to mind the first rule in deciphering the Bush code of conduct: Reverse what they say to divine what they’ll do.

This budget goes straight for the jugular, proposing \$212 billion in cuts to domestic discretionary programs over the next five years, coupled with tax cuts for the rich that aim to radically shrink government and anger middle- and low-income voters. Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform, described the doctrine to *U.S. News & World Report*: “The goal is reducing the size and scope of government by draining its lifeblood.”

The audacity of these cuts lays bare yet another Republican strategy: Overshoot the mark, call anyone who questions you partisan and then look “compassionate” by offering a small concession. To wit, as happened in early January: Have your party’s right flank propose to dramatically weaken House ethics rules, and then appear reasonable when this proposal is scaled back to a seemingly minor rule change that still effectively protects Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Texas).

The Bush administration sets its targets and pursues them with no qualm or quarter; the budget is more mean than lean. Children (remember: reverse!) are

left behind in droves; Almost one third of the programs selected for cuts are in education, including \$400 million for after-school programs and \$300 million for vocational education. Funding for national parks and clean water is on the chopping block. Soldiers seem to be worth more dead than alive—a Pentagon-backed bill in Congress would raise soldiers’ death benefits from \$12,420 to \$100,000, but the proposed budget would double prescription drug prices for veterans. The poor and elderly are also out of luck: Cuts are proposed for Medicare, job-training programs, food stamps and heating subsidies.

Meanwhile, the Bush darlings—the military, corporations and the ultrarich—benefit not only from increased budget spending, but from the promise of such extra-budgetary sops as the continuation of current tax cuts and the generation of fat financial fees for proposed Social Security “personal accounts.” All of this contributes to a mounting deficit that the administration cynically uses to justify future Social Security cuts.

Of course, this budget won’t pass without a fight—but that’s the point. Democrats—estranged from and ashamed of their progressive flank—wear themselves out to retain gains gruelingly won through

nearly a century of grassroots action. Weak protests about the White House’s “wrong priorities” make little headway against Republicans who shamelessly trumpet their ill-founded and contradictory creed.

On the defensive, Democrats cast about for a narrative, grasping at pale imitations of the tactics that work wonders for the right. This dynamic played out in the Democratic responses to the State of the Union address. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid tried for homespun and small-town, while House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi played the fear card. Like adults trying too hard to be cool, it all rang false.

The Democrats need to commit to a firm set of principles sturdy enough to block the Bush administration’s meat-cleaver politics. Through a little overreaching of their own, the Democrats could not only widen the spectrum of political possibility but also ignite the same passions that animated former populist movements.

Some signs are hopeful. A few brave members of Congress, like Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), continue to boldly speak out against Republican tactics. Howard Dean is a lock for the Democratic National Committee chairmanship. And his popular 2004 campaign, along with the election efforts of grassroots groups like Rainbow/PUSH, have spurred the formation of the Progressive Democrats of America, a group dedicated to retaking the Democratic Party from corporate influence, state by state.

We need more of this—and fast. ■



Steward of Accuracy

In a recent speech that I made on religion and the environment, which was adapted by *In These Times*, I made a mistake in quoting remarks attributed to James Watt, former secretary of the interior, by the online journal *Grist* without confirming them myself ("Blind Faith," February 28). Because those or similar quotes had also appeared through the years in many other publications—in the *Washington Post* and *Time*, for example, as well as in several books that I consulted in preparing my speech—I too easily assumed their legitimacy. Despite their widespread currency I should have checked their accuracy before using them. *Grist* and the *Washington Post* have now published corrections concerning the quote attributed to Watt in 1981. I talked to Watt on

the phone and expressed my own regret at using a quote that I had not myself confirmed. I also told him that I continue to find his policies as secretary of the interior abysmally at odds with what I, as well as other Christians, understand to be our obligation to be stewards of the earth.

Bill Moyers
New York

Stern Solidarity

All of a sudden, Andy Stern becomes "the fly in the ointment" as far as the mainstream union leadership is concerned ("The Fight for our Future," February 14). For decades, as union membership dwindled and more and more union presidents jumped into bed with management, the pride and militancy associated with

"being a union man/woman" became something akin to being an axe murderer. I walked Teamster picket lines in the '50s and '60s when the unions were behind our every move—including breaking heads. Solidarity was much, much more than just a frigging buzzword.

So Stern shook up the fat cats and they do not like it. He wants unions to be more like the unions of old rather than a quivering mass of conciliators. I for one would like to see us organized along the lines of our European brothers and sisters. I would like to see us able to shut the system down until we win decent wages and health care for all. I think Andy Stern has the right idea.

Frank Pitz
Pompano Beach, Fla.

The Final Non-Solution

As a photojournalist who was based in El Salvador and Guatemala during 10 years of the civil wars in those countries, I would like to challenge some erroneous statements made by Robert Parry in his otherwise revealing story "Bush's Death Squads" (February 14). Parry maintains "the insurgencies in El Salvador and Guatemala were crushed through the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians." This is not accurate. While it is true that mainly urban

death squads, combined with a "scorched earth" strategy in some areas of the countryside of both countries, did kill tens of thousands of leftist sympathizers during the critical period from 1979 to 1982, it did not "crush" the insurgency. In both cases the wars ended in negotiations over a decade later after sometimes spectacularly heavy fighting by the insurgents.

With regard to the effect of death squads on the Salvadoran population, it was precisely the possibility of being killed by staying in one's own home that caused thousands of people to join the leftist guerrillas in the countryside and was the impetus for many more to sympathize with and economically support them. The relevant lesson from El Salvador for Iraq is that U.S.-directed murder and terror may work to some degree over the short term, but over the long term it will only ratchet up resistance and hostility to the United States to new levels, and further besmirch the United States' already murderous reputation throughout the world.

Jeremy Bigwood
Washington, D.C.

Save the Tuna

Sandra Steingraber writes wonderful books and articles, "How Mercury-Tainted Tuna Damages Fetal Brains" (January 17) included. The omitted point is: No one has to eat any tuna, or any fish at all. Sadly, this solution rarely occurs to carnivores.

Coco Hall
Director, Peace Quest
Sausalito, Calif.

www.inthesetimes.com

DISCUSSION

"Crimes against nature never go unpunished, and the original insanity of grinding up cattle to feed to cattle will eventually infect all who subscribe to this outrageous, profit-driven, self serving madness and the unlucky will reap the spongiform benefits. The problem is that those who are totally consumed by greed have foisted this raunchy delicacy on a population that had placed inherently misguided and totally undeserved trust in the ranchers and farmers who 'feed us all.' Who among us was NOT shocked to realize soylent green was already a reality for bovines (and other domesticated animals)? What other surprises do these idiots have for us in the future?"

Debate online at "Mad Cows and Americans."

How to Combat Offshoring

Congratulations to David Moberg for his article examining the issue of offshoring ("High-Tech Hijack," February 14).

Progressives have an incredible opportunity to slow the offshoring of skilled jobs by understanding the intersections of race, class, technical knowledge transfer and our old-fashioned American habit of discriminating at the hiring door. They're all rolled into one via the guest worker programs.

The H1-B guest worker program gives the power to corporations to reserve, exclude and remove jobs from the domestic job market via a form called the Labor Condition Application (LCA). Once the Department of Labor approves the LCA, corporations can circumvent federal hiring guidelines. Requests are almost always approved and are only denied once the annual cap has been reached. Equal opportunity has been turned on its head—citizens, green card holders and even the undocumented are all equally denied the chance to compete for these positions.

This program has been effective in constricting opportunity and hardening class mobility in fields that should be giving sharp kids a break. For instance, in Chicago, from October 2000 to July 2003, 4,752 companies took advantage of the H1-B program to remove

76,734 jobs from the city.

The glass ceiling effect of the program seems obvious, but the systematic flow of technical knowledge away from the U.S. workforce may not be. Currently, most companies will only provide on-the-job training to H1-B visa holders; domestic information technology workers must hit the ground running. This brain drain is isolating the U.S. workforce from the increasingly digital and global economy.

Offshoring can be slowed substantially by ending the guest worker programs. Some of the top offshoring companies have built their business model around these government regulations. But don't take my word for it. Take Wipro's, one of the top Indian offshoring companies. Their Securities and Exchange Commission filing states, "If U.S. immigration laws

change and make it more difficult for us to obtain H-1B visas for our employees, our ability to compete for and provide services to clients in the United States could be impaired."

Hmm ... ending legal discrimination in hiring and slowing the rate of offshoring in a single action? Sounds like a recipe for success!

Donna Conroy
Chicago

Clarification

Due to an editing error, Patsy Spier was incompletely quoted in "The Other After-shock" (February 28). Her final quote should have read: "They've got to be willing to bring to justice those people who committed crimes [in Aceh, Papua and East Timor] and are still in service."

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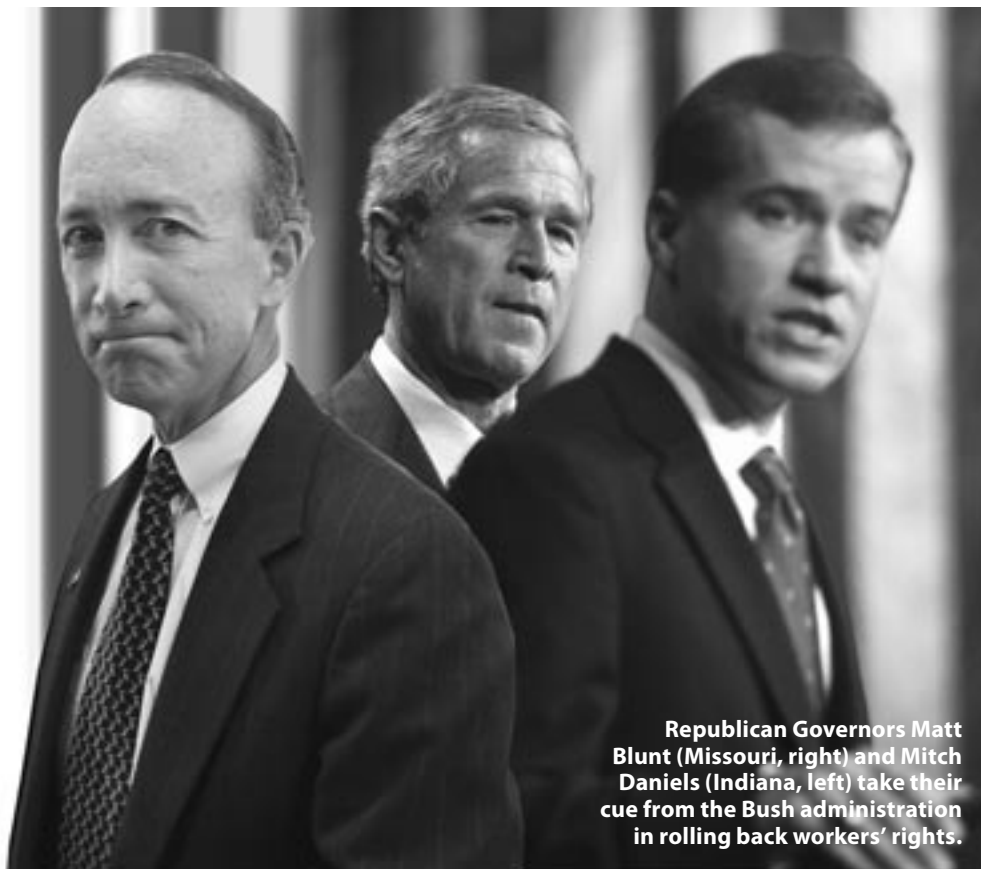
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Republican Governors Matt Blunt (Missouri, right) and Mitch Daniels (Indiana, left) take their cue from the Bush administration in rolling back workers' rights.

The Midwest Union Rollback

Newly elected Republican governors nix public workers' collective bargaining rights. *By David Bacon*

SOMEONE IN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY IS OBVIOUSLY paying attention to the last decade's statistics on union growth, which show the biggest gains among public employees. A recent wave of decisions against public workers in Midwest states is threatening to reverse that trend.

Recently elected Republican governors in both Indiana and Missouri have rescinded previous measures that extended state employees collective bargaining rights. Governor Ernie Fletcher did the same last year in Kentucky. And public sector bargaining is under siege in Iowa and Oklahoma.

At a time when the labor movement is declining, and now represents only 12.5 percent of the workforce, these attacks have intensified the crisis of declining

union density by aiming at an area where, at least in terms of numbers, unions have been most successful.

In Missouri, Gov. Matt Blunt had promised that he would end collective bargaining for state workers during his campaign, and he did just that within days of taking office. Workers hadn't had bargaining rights that long—it was only in 2001 that then-Gov. Bob Holden, a Democrat, issued an executive order allowing them to form unions and negotiate contracts.

Of the state's 61,000 workers, about 25,000 joined the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and the Service Employees International Union. Thus far, the two unions have negotiated agreements covering 9,000 people, including probation and parole workers, maintenance

employees, nurses and other healthcare workers. Clauses that require membership as a condition of employment are illegal under Missouri's "right to work" law, so those contracts have agency-fee provisions that require workers to pay unions a fee for bargaining, even if they don't belong.

As secretary of state, Blunt had previously challenged Holden's order allowing agency fees, but an administrative law judge ruled against him. Upon taking office, Blunt claimed that the already-negotiated contracts were void, since they hadn't been reviewed and approved by the Missouri General Assembly. The legislature, controlled by Republicans, would not likely approve any union contracts, even if it got the chance.

In Indiana, Gov. Mitch Daniels hadn't warned anyone of his intention to cancel bargaining during his election campaign, but no sooner had he been sworn in than he too ended collective bargaining for state workers.

The process in Indiana was much more firmly established. In an intra-union battle royal in the early '90s, a number of unions competed fiercely for representation rights after Democratic Gov. Evan Bayh signed the initial executive order in 1989. Of Indiana's 35,000 state employees, 14,000 finally won representation by the Unity Team, a partnership between the United Auto Workers and the American Federation of Teachers. Another 8,600 workers belong to AFSCME, while 1,400 state police and law enforcement personnel belong to the International Union of Police Associations.

Like those in Missouri, the union contracts covered vacations, seniority rights, job training and education, and grievance procedures, in addition to wages. While half the state's employees earn less than \$29,738 a year, the unions were successful in pushing salaries upward, and in one year some workers received raises as much as 20 percent. Daniels' order made all of this subject to unilateral decision by state bureaucrats. In place of grievance procedures, he gave state workers the right to appeal discipline decisions to the State Employees Appeals Commission, which has a record of reversing only 2 percent of managerial decisions.

Indiana's public bargaining arrangement has to be reauthorized every term by each incoming governor. After Bayh, Governors Frank O'Bannon and Joe Kernan each issued the required executive order. Daniels refused to do so. While public sec-

tor collective bargaining bills have been introduced into the legislature every session, a Republican majority has blocked it each time.

Democrats in the legislature have sworn to take action if Daniels doesn't reverse course, but it's difficult to imagine what they could do. State Rep. Patrick Bauer admitted it was a long shot, but said, "The people of Indiana will know who stands in their corner." AFSCME is discussing a media and public education campaign. The Unity Team has threatened a lawsuit. In the meantime, Fuzz LeMay, president of Unity Local 9212, put an appeal on their Web site urging workers not to pay attention to managers saying the union was out of business. "I simply say to you brothers and sisters, stay in this fight!" he exhorted. "Your union dues are not that high. There will be better days ahead!"

Meanwhile, in Oklahoma, collective bargaining for municipal workers (other than fire and police) was declared unconstitutional by County District Judge Daniel Owens, in a case brought by the city of Enid. The law giving public workers union rights in cities with more than 35,000 people was only passed last year, but already legislation has been introduced to repeal it if the judge's order fails. And in Iowa, Republican Rep. Bill Dix has unveiled a proposal that would authorize the legislature and governor to intervene in negotiations involving state workers.

All these efforts take their political cue from the Bush administration, which has mounted a concerted campaign to roll back the union rights of federal workers since it first came to power. After 9/11, Bush voided collective bargaining for 186,000 workers in the Homeland Security Department, and has threatened to do the same in the even-larger Defense Department.

The assault on Midwest public workers, says AFL-CIO President John J. Sweeney, "echoes a message coming from the White House down to men and women on the front lines of our struggles against poverty, disease, crime and terrorism all across our country: 'We expect first-class devotion, service and sacrifice, but we will treat you like second-class citizens.'"

In the current discussions over the direction of the labor movement, some voices have proposed a more militant response. Now that the attack on workers has spread to the states, such proposals are sure to be raised more frequently, and more loudly. ■

IN SHORT

Runaway Wal-Mart

Wal-Mart Canada announced that it is closing its first North American outlet where workers have successfully unionized. The store is in Jonquiere, about 240 miles northeast of Montreal; the closure will put 190 employees out of work.

Wal-Mart, which also has two other non-unionized stores in the region, said the decision was not an attempt to bust the union. The company's Canada spokesperson, Andrew Pelletier, told reporters, "This store could easily have closed months ago and we didn't do that. We made a determination we were going to bargain in good faith."

The decision came only one day after Quebec Labour Minister Michel Despres notified Wal-Mart that he agreed with the union's demand for binding arbitration.

The union representing the Wal-Mart workers, the United Food & Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW), issued a brief written statement in response. Its national director, Michael J. Fraser, wrote, "It's clear that Wal-Mart decided to shut the store because the employees and their union had applied, as allowed under the Quebec labor code, for binding arbitration leading to a first contract. It's also clear that Wal-Mart's announcement is meant to have a chilling effect on organizing campaigns currently under way in other locations across Canada." The union plans to file unfair labor practice charges against the retail titan with the Quebec Labour Relations Board.

In the United States, UFCW Executive Vice President Michael E. Leonard warned in November of a "pattern of contempt for this nation's labor laws that shows how low Wal-Mart will stoop to keep its workers from exercising their right to have a union."

The closest a U.S. union has ever come to winning a battle with Wal-Mart was in 2000, in Texas, when 11 meatcutters voted to join the UFCW. That effort failed when Wal-Mart eliminated the job of meatcutter companywide and began stocking only pre-wrapped meat.

—Christopher Burrow

APPALL-O-METER

4.2 Killers Need Love, Too

What kind of society would we be if we didn't take care of our snipers? Sure, you might think they live the life of Riley, greasin' evildoers from 300 yards away all the livelong day. But have you considered how much less gratifying their job is without the benefits of the latest high-tech doodads?

Well, the College Republicans at Marquette University have thought about it. At the college's annual Mission Week (theme this year: "Constructing Peace"), the group invited students to contribute money to the "Adopt a Sniper" program. Those who made a \$5 donation, according to the *Marquette Tribune*, were offered a dog tag with the U.S. Marines' slogan, "One Shot, One Kill, No Remorse, I Decide."

Marquette's administration found this campaign at odds with its mission—it's a Catholic university—and shut the operation down. "It's obvious that they have liberal leanings—that's a Jesuit trait," Brandon Henak, chairman of the campus College Republicans, told the *Tribune*. "They don't believe in what the snipers are doing and so they don't support our program."

3.3 Teach Your Children Well

If you're one of those people who regard America's youth as narcissistic, incurious and generally indifferent to the world outside their favorite Halo 2 scenario, a new study suggests that you may be too generous with your praise.

The study, funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, asked 112,003 high school students what they knew, and thought, about the First Amendment. After the First Amendment was read to them, reports MSNBC, more than one third of students opined that it goes "too far" to protect rights.



And 36 percent of students believed that newspapers should only be able to publish with "government approval." A slight majority—51 percent—favored a free press. Thir-

teen percent apparently didn't understand the question.

4.3 Jeffy, We Hardly Knew Ye

It's heartening that in this age of rampant media bias, a man unsullied by any detectable connection to the Fourth Estate can find unprecedented access as a White House correspondent. Less encouraging is the fact that Jeff Gannon—wunderkind cub reporter who burst onto the national scene last month by asking President Bush on national television if the Democrats weren't "divorced" from "reality"—seems to be hiding something from his audience. As the bloggers at DailyKos have discovered, Gannon, who entered life as James Guckert, seems to be something of an "alternative" lifestyle entrepreneur, intimately connected with hotmilitarystud.com, militaryescort.com, and militaryescortm4m.com. Now he has disappeared, leaving us to wonder what lay behind his frequent denunciation of the "gay agenda."

—Dave Mulcahey

Spellbound

A specter is haunting the Middle East: the specter of "democratic occupation." *By Neve Gordon*

IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT, following the Sharm El-Sheikh summit on Feb. 8, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas used almost the same language to announce a cessation of hostilities between the two peoples. Reading from a prewritten script, they both stated that the Palestinians would stop all acts of violence against Israelis, while Israel would cease all military activity against Palestinians. The director of the show was not Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the host of the event, but newly appointed U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. To be sure, neither Rice nor any other American was present at the summit, but the Bush administration's spirit was ubiquitous.

Many reporters and analysts applauded the meeting, claiming that it will pave the way for a resumption of dialogue and cooperation. They seemed to suggest that Israelis and Palestinians are on the doorstep of a new era. All of this begs the question: Will the Bush administration manage to stop the seemingly endless cycle of violence and rekindle the so-called Israeli-Palestinian peace process?

The answer is a resounding yes—on the condition, of course, that one believes in magic.

President George W. Bush would have to succeed in casting at least one of two spells in order to create fertile ground for negotiations. He would need to charm Abbas into renouncing the three most essential demands that

have informed the Palestinian struggle since the late '80s: Israel's full withdrawal to the 1967 borders, the establishment of a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and the recognition of the rights of Palestinian refugees. Or alternatively, Bush would have to enchant Sharon and get him to abandon his plan of creating Palestinian Bantustans in the Gaza Strip and in approximately 50 percent of the West Bank, with no Palestinian right of return and no sovereignty over any part of Jerusalem.

But even if Abbas were to fall prey to the spell, his renunciation would be worthless, because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a clash of civilizations, despite the ongoing attempt of the mainstream media to present it as such. Instead, it's a struggle between two unequal rivals over land, self-determination and basic human rights. And basic human rights are not a commodity that a leader can easily bargain with or exchange.

It is also difficult to imagine Sharon being so enthralled that he would actually change his position. After all, he was the proponent of "the Jordan is Palestine solution" for many years and currently considers a withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank as a major concession.

But if the magic won't work, then how is the Bush administration planning to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Why is Secretary Rice so optimistic?

The answer lies in Iraq and Afghanistan, where a unique Middle Eastern model is being enforced. Bush and his aides



**Abbas and Sharon
shake on the latest
peace agreement.**

PEDRO UGARTE / GETTY IMAGES

have managed to resurrect a distinct political practice rarely used in the history of humankind, and for this at least, they deserve credit. For lack of a better term, one could call this practice “democratic occupation,” a neologism recently formulated by former Israeli Knesset member Tamar Gozansky. The strategy is straightforward: gaining and maintaining control of the land, while bestowing a democratic face on the occupation.

Even though Western commentators praised the elections that were recently carried out in Iraq, Afghanistan and the occupied Palestinian territories, the correspondents seemed to have overlooked the essential fact that popular power and authority don’t rest with the people in any of these entities, even after the elections. If, for example, a referendum were carried out in any of these regions asking the residents whether they wanted the foreign troops to leave, imagine how many would answer positively. But would the forces actually leave these ostensibly democratic areas?

Another way of testing these democracies is to ask a series of forthright questions: Will

the newly elected Iraqi parliament really rule the country? Does President Hamid Karzai control Afghanistan? And who is in command of the occupied Palestinian territories—Mahmoud Abbas?

Considering that the Bush administration is unwilling to pressure Israel to dismantle all of its settlements and to respect its recognized international borders—the necessary conditions for true negotiations between the two parties—it seems that the Sharm El-Sheikh summit was convened because the administration wants to replicate the “democratic occupation” model in the Israeli-Palestinian context.

This is not to say that Bush lacks talent as a magician. Indeed, since the true goal of his administration is to control and dominate the Middle East, the fact that he has managed to convince the majority of Americans that he is promoting freedom and democracy in the region is no less than fantastic. ■

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Minu and Joschka:
What makes
him so sexy?

IN PERSON



Germany's Red-Green Romeo *By Paul Hockenos*

GERMANY'S MEDIA WORLD tittered with delight when the country's popular foreign minister and Green Party leader, Joschka Fischer, brought his new romantic interest, 28-year-old German-born Persian beauty Minu Barati, to the annual Press Ball. Though Fischer rarely cracks a smile, he must have grinned at the right-wing *Bild* newspaper's gushing banner headline the next day: "What Makes Joschka So Sexy?"

For nearly six years, since shortly after the Social Democrat and Green "red-green" coalition came to power, Fischer has topped Germany's popularity polls. The source of Fischer's unusually high approval ratings is anything but self-evident; his unorthodox biography and radical political past wouldn't seem to endear him to the average German burgher.

Fischer's parents were ethnic Germans expelled from Hungary in 1946, the bottom of the barrel in an occupied and destitute postwar Germany. He never earned a university degree and made his early living as a book thief.

His excesses as a street-fighting Frankfurt anarchist during the '70s came to public light in 2000, and conservatives called upon him to resign. One stark photo dug up by journalists caught Fischer at a 1973 demonstration doling out a gratuitous beating to a solitary police officer with the help of a few comrades. But, remarkably, the scandals passed over without denting Fischer's credibility, even among conservative voters.

In the late '70s, Fischer gave up on revolutionary socialism and forswore violence as a political tool. Disillusioned, for years he drove a taxi nights in Frankfurt, pondering the enigma of a flawed but unreformable democracy. During the day, he worked in the Karl Marx Bookshop, a co-op that included many of his future political allies in the Greens, like Dany Cohn-Bendit, the hero of the Paris May 1968 uprising, and Tom Koenigs, today Germany's top human rights coordinator. Perhaps this is his secret: Fischer and several fellow cabinet ministers, including Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, belong to a postwar generation that many Germans identify with.

When the Green Party formed in 1980 as an electoral platform for an amalgam of groups from the peace, anti-nuke, ecological and women's movements, Fischer was intensely skeptical. Parliamentary democracy and feminism weren't his thing any more than knitted wool sweaters or muesli. During the wild Frankfurt years the left's women often found Fischer unbearably macho and

authoritarian. But when the new party began putting its people into regional legislatures across West Germany, Fischer joined its ranks and began a bruising climb to its top.

Fischer and his all-male "Frankfurt Gang" established themselves as the party's hard-nosed pragmatists, or "realos," the wing dedicated to an electoral strategy in contrast to the idealistic Green fundamentalists, or "fundis." An inner party war between the two factions raged throughout the '80s until the realos finally prevailed. Since then, under Fischer's firm stewardship, the former "anti-party party" has become part of the mainstream. Now the republic's third largest party, the Greens are a safe, liberal option.

The taming of the once anti-establishment Greens may be another source of Fischer's appeal across the political spectrum. But along the way, the compromises pushed through by the pragmatists were too much for many of the Greens' original supporters, some of whom today count among Fischer's most trenchant adversaries.

As foreign minister, Fischer has endorsed an interventionist foreign policy that can hardly be described as Green. But he's an internationally respected statesman, and many Germans applaud the country's engagement worldwide in the name of humanitarian goals. Even before the full extent of the South Asian tsunami's devastation was known, Fischer recognized it as a crisis of enormous proportions and began to act; Germany offered the tsunami-hit countries more aid than any other.

Fischer and Schröder are pushing for a German seat on the U.N. Security Council. "Germans are sensitive about their image and they like the fact that Fischer has stature and is respected abroad," says Ute Zapf, a Social Democratic parliamentarian.

It has long been rumored that Fischer is tired of the foreign ministry job and covets the posts of European Union foreign minister or U.N. secretary-general. But Fischer's public appeal and campaigning prowess are critical for red-green reelection chances in 2006. Fischer has promised Chancellor Schröder that he plans to stay on board, at least for awhile.

Until then, he may have to content himself with a spiced-up private life. Miss Barati and her six-year-old daughter have moved into Fischer's Berlin Mitte apartment near the gold-capped synagogue. ■

PAUL HOCKENOS is an American writer who lives in Berlin. He is writing a political biography of Joschka Fischer for Oxford University Press.



Genocide by Attrition

A JAN. 25 REPORT FROM THE U.N.-APPOINTED International Commission of Inquiry on the conflict in the Darfur region of western Sudan noted evidence of “crimes against humanity,” but found no evidence of “genocidal intent” on Khartoum’s part. Yet as the violence enters its third year, Khartoum’s counterinsurgency warfare becomes ever more conspicuously genocide by attrition.

The scale of human destruction and suffering in the region has reached almost incomprehensible dimensions. The non-Arab African tribal populations from which the Darfuri insurgencies have drawn forces have suffered total mortality from disease, malnutrition and violence in the range of 400,000. Another 2.5 million people have been internally displaced within Darfur or across the border into Chad. Forced relocation of the displaced remains Khartoum’s ultimate solution to the humanitarian problem. Altogether, roughly 3 million people are now “conflict-affected,” and in increasingly desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

Khartoum’s Arab militia allies, the Janjaweed, continue their brutal predations, and the number of displaced continues to grow. Those in camps for the displaced are at the mercy of the Janjaweed. Hundreds of women and girls leaving camps to collect firewood (necessary for cooking the raw grain that is often the only food provided) have been raped, continuing the use of rape as a racialized weapon of war.

Violence also continues to define life in those rural areas not yet destroyed by Khartoum’s scorched-earth campaign. The African Union (AU) and other sources on the ground in Darfur confirm that the regime has used helicopter gunships and Antonov bombers against undefended villages, fleeing civilians, and even humanitarian personnel and resources.

What the United Nations has called the “world’s greatest humanitarian crisis” is only getting greater. But the very description of Darfur as a “humanitarian crisis” is an indication of the international community’s inability, once again, to confront what is clearly genocide. The realities of Darfur are not incidental to the war, they are not a massive case of “collateral damage.” To put it in the language of the 1948 U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Khartoum’s war effort is “deliberately inflicting on the non-Arab tribal groups of Darfur conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction in whole or in part.”

What is the international response to ongoing genocide in Africa—a genocide that may ultimately claim

more lives than the Rwandan genocide of 1994? To date, aside from a humanitarian aid effort that serves fewer than half those in need, this response consists of 1,400 AU monitors, who have been deployed without a civilian protection mandate, are woefully underequipped, and are prevented from investigating atrocities or cease-fire violations unless Khartoum agrees. Further, the AU troops—whose deployment is a fig leaf to cover the world’s inaction—have been constrained by contrived fuel shortages for their helicopters, hostile ground fire and denial of access by Khartoum.

This small AU force is powerless to stop genocidal violence in a region the size of France. And it is the violence that has displaced people into squalid, disease-ridden camps; that has precipitated the complete collapse of Darfur’s agricultural economy; that has fatally undermined relations between Arab and African populations in Darfur; and that ensures the ranks of the insurgency movements will never lack for young recruits who have seen family members killed, mothers and sisters raped, and children flung into bonfires. Without robust humanitarian intervention, of a sort very tentatively suggested by NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer on Feb. 4, Khartoum’s genocide in Darfur will continue—Rwanda in slow motion.

At the center of the international failure, however, is a continuing refusal to speak honestly about the genocidal nature of the human destruction in Darfur. This reflects in part an obscene deference to Chinese diplomatic efforts to protect the Khartoum regime. The National Islamic Front is China’s indispensable partner in oil production and development efforts in southern Sudan, and Beijing will allow no actions that threaten rule by this tyrannical clique of genocidaires. Moreover, the war in Iraq continues to take its toll on U.S. efforts to act effectively within the United Nations—efforts that have been hobbled by the profligate squandering of diplomatic capital.

But there is ample reason to see the United Nations itself as part of the betrayal of Darfur. The report from the Commission of Inquiry, with its highly politicized determination not to use the term “genocide,” is distinguished by bizarre contradictory reasoning, a selective pattern of adducing evidence and an unforgivable failure to conduct forensic investigations of the many sites of mass executions of African tribal populations.

Though it is not without merit, the U.N. report is nonetheless a moral outrage. In other words, it’s a fitting emblem of the world’s response to Darfur. ■

Without robust humanitarian intervention, Khartoum’s genocide in Darfur will continue—Rwanda in slow motion.

ERIC REEVES is a professor at Smith College. He has testified several times before Congress on the ongoing crisis in Sudan. His writings on the subject have appeared in *The Nation*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* and many international publications.



Back Talk *By Susan J. Douglas*

Debtor Nation

The financial institutions that issue credit cards are major Washington lobbyists and, thus, virtually unregulated.

AS THE PRESIDENT AND HIS CORPORATE PATRONS seek to turn the management of Americans' retirements—a.k.a., our "golden years"—over to those highly trustworthy, humanitarian types on Wall Street, we should look at another model of how corporate America helps people manage their finances—the credit card companies—to get a glimpse of where we are headed.

Here are some of my recent favorite credit card gambits: The amount of time my credit card company gives me to turn around and pay the bill has shrunk to about two and a half weeks—otherwise, I'm late. The late fee I pay even if the check arrives one day late has, within two years, gone from about \$20 to about \$40. They have begun posting a payment due date that is a Sunday—when, of course, they don't do business—and if the check arrives Monday, you are docked the late fee plus all the interest. The interest rates, given what the rest of us get paid on our savings accounts and CDs, would make Shylock blush and certainly revive the word "usurious." Dare to miss a payment, and the company may raise your interest rate up to an outrageous 25 percent. And let's not forget that the financial institutions that issue credit cards are major Washington lobbyists and, thus, virtually unregulated.

All of this and more was recently exposed in "The Secret History of the Credit Card," produced by "Frontline" and the *New York Times*. Here are some under-reported doozies from the show: Through a policy called "universal default," if you are late with a payment to someone else—say your mortgage company—your credit card company can raise your interest rates automatically because they feel you have become a riskier client. How do they know if you've been late on a car payment? They can now monitor, on a daily basis, your financial transactions and your credit rating.

Always, always, they are trolling for and sticking it to the most financially vulnerable; just as in Bush's budget, those in the most financially precarious positions are the ones made to pay the most. Millions of people already in financial hot water are solicited to accept yet more credit cards. The companies also set the minimum monthly payments so low that consumers could easily be in debt for the rest of their lives.

According to "Frontline," since there is no federal government regulation of late payment fees, "the amount of revenue the companies generate from fees ... has doubled" in the last 10 years. Some predict that late fees will go to \$50 within the year. The compa-

nies can also change your interest rate at will—they just have to give you 15 days' notice. And why are so many of these card companies, like Citibank or Bank USA, based in places like South Dakota or Delaware? Because these states (unlike some others) have no caps on interest rates.

Approximately 10 companies control nearly all credit card accounts, and they have their own individual and collective lobbyists working the Hill daily to make sure there is no investigation into the industry. One thing they also want to ensure is their continued ability to violate your privacy by sharing your financial information with telemarketers or other third parties, even if you object. According to U.S. PIRG, they have also been lobbying hard to change the bankruptcy laws so that it would be harder to qualify for Chapter 7 "fresh start" bankruptcy; instead, people would have to go into a Chapter 13 "5-year repayment plan" program, which, not surprisingly, would include unpaid credit cards. Both Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) and John Kerry have proposed legislation that would require greater disclosure about what it *really* costs to carry this debt and that would prohibit the arbitrary increasing of interest rates. Given who controls Congress, don't hold your breath.

In part because of these shenanigans, the *Kiplinger* newsletter reports, "the rate at which people file for bankruptcy has increased 40 percent over the past 10 years and now totals 8.6 out of every 1,000 Americans." Older Americans, *Kiplinger* predicts, will lead the way. Burdened by taking care of children and aging parents in middle age, and then confronted by escalating health and medical bills while on a fixed—or, if Bush has his way, declining—income in old age, it will be senior citizens whose bankruptcy rates will soar.

The Bush version of Social Security will be just like this. It will further impoverish the poor, the working classes and women and be filled with hidden scams that benefit the financial institutions at our expense. Given that most Americans hate their credit card companies—the industry has a very high complaint rate—opponents of Bush's efforts to privatize Social Security might do well to use the industry as a predictor of what is to come.

Just imagine—the same financial interests that gouge you now, have indecipherable rules in their microscopic agreements, enjoy no regulation and can do whatever they want to screw the average American will soon control our retirements. Priceless. ■

SUSAN J. DOUGLAS
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Sinking in Deeper

LIKE MANY OF HIS U.S. PRESS COLLEAGUES, *New York Times* foreign policy columnist Thomas L. Friedman has pronounced himself “unreservedly happy” about the Iraqi election of Jan. 30, adding: “You should be, too.”

But rather than pointing toward an exit for the United States from Iraq, the election may just be another mirage, hiding the fact that U.S. troops could be pulled in to Iraq’s long and bloody history of sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shiites.

Indeed, if the Sunni-based insurgency doesn’t give up in the months ahead, American soldiers could find themselves enmeshed in a long and brutal civil war, helping the Shiite majority crush the resistance of the Sunni minority. The Sunnis, who have long dominated Iraq, find themselves in a tight corner and may see little choice but to fight on.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003 started the Sunnis’ reversal of fortune by ousting the Sunni-run government of Saddam Hussein. Since then, the armed resistance, based in the so-called Sunni Triangle, has represented the Sunnis’ reaction to their sharply diminished status as well as their resentment of the U.S.-led military occupation.

Now, the election has hardened this new reality of the Sunnis’ secondary role, leaving them a painful choice of either accepting Shiite domination of the country’s political system or challenging the powerful U.S. military in a guerrilla war that could turn many Sunni communities into smoking ruins like Fallujah.

Those troubling prospects represent a scenario that the U.S. news media has largely ignored. As Iraqis raised fingers stained with voting ink, American journalists scrambled over each other to climb on board George W. Bush’s bandwagon, again.

Just as the U.S. press corps feared challenging Bush during the WMD hysteria in fall 2002, the press corps treated the Iraqi election as an unquestioned success story, much as Friedman did in his column, titled “A Day to Remember.”

But, like those earlier examples of press acquiescence, the lack of skepticism about the real meaning of the Jan. 30 election carries potential dangers for Americans, especially if the triumphal Bush administration now starts dusting off its most ambitious plans for the Middle East. If that happens, the military disaster in Iraq, which has cost the lives of more than 1,400 American soldiers and tens of thousands of Iraqis, could be a prelude to catastrophes to come.

Indeed, many of the U.S. mistakes in Iraq can be traced to the American euphoria after the successful three-week U.S. military campaign that ousted Hussein in April 2003. Weeks later, Bush donned a flight suit, landed on a U.S. aircraft carrier returning home from Iraq and pronounced the end of major combat under a banner reading “Mission Accomplished.”

Then, instead of moving to hold the quick elections favored by retired Gen. Jay Garner, the first U.S. administrator in Iraq, Bush’s neoconservative advisers pushed to restructure Iraq’s economy by selling off government assets and adopting a “free market” model. A quick election might have given some legitimacy to a new Iraqi government and left less political space for insurgents to build their resistance to the U.S. occupation.

Reflecting these pumped-up ambitions, Garner’s replacement, Paul Bremer, put off Iraqi elections pending the drafting of a constitution. Over the next several months, however, the Bush administration’s ambitious economic schemes floundered, as the insurgency grew.

Eventually, faced with demands from Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, U.S. officials agreed to accelerate the timetable for elections. By then, however, Sunni areas had become largely ungovernable. Many Sunni leaders urged a postponement of the election until better security could be arranged. But Shiite leaders, sensing certain victory, insisted on the scheduled election, as did President Bush, who had built up the election as a potential turning point in the Iraq war.

The election indeed did prove to be a public-relations boon for the Bush administration and a psychological setback for the insurgents. While much of the enthusiasm about the voting appears real, later reports indicated that many polling stations in Sunni areas were virtually deserted and others hadn’t gotten a full supply of ballots.

The election followed what should have been an anticipated course. The long-oppressed Shiite majority, expecting to gain the bulk of national power, voted in large numbers, as did the Kurds, who want either autonomy or outright independence. The Sunnis, the powerful minority who had the most to lose from the election, either boycotted or voted in low numbers.

Now, the question is whether the Sunnis will seek some post-election accommodation with the Shiites or will continue resisting the new U.S.-backed power structure. If they choose the latter, the election may end up locking the U.S. military into a long-term role as the military arm of a Shiite-dominated government waging a counterinsurgency war. ■

Rather than provide an exit, the Iraqi election could draw U.S. troops into a burgeoning civil war.

ROBERT PARRY broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the '80s for the *Associated Press* and *Newsweek*. His new book, *Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq, can be ordered at secrecy-andprivilege.com.*



CHRIS HONDROS / GETTY IMAGES

BY STEVE FREEMAN AND JOSH MITTELDORF

RECALL THE ELECTION DAY EXIT polls that suggested John Kerry had won a convincing victory? The media readily dismissed those polls and little has been heard about them since.

Many Americans, however, were suspicious. Although President Bush prevailed by 3 million votes in the official, tallied vote count, exit polls had projected a margin of victory of 5 million votes for Kerry. This unexplained 8 million vote discrepancy between the election night exit polls and the official count should raise a Chinese May Day of red flags.

The U.S. voting system is more vulnerable to manipulation than most Americans realize. Technologies such as electronic voting machines provide no confirmation that votes are counted as cast, and highly partisan election officials have the power to suppress votes and otherwise distort the count.

Exit polls are highly accurate. They re-

move most of the sources of potential polling error by identifying actual voters and asking them immediately afterward who they had voted for.

The reliability of exit polls is so generally accepted that the Bush administration helped pay for them during recent elections in Georgia, Belarus and Ukraine. Testifying before the House Committee on International Relations Dec. 7, John Tefft, deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, explained that the Bush administration funded exit polls because they were one of the “ways that would help to expose large-scale fraud.” Tefft pointed to the discrepancy between exit polls and the official vote count to argue that the Nov. 22 Ukraine election was stolen.

Grasping at explanations

Last November in the United States, as in Ukraine, the discrepancy between the presidential exit polls and the tallied count

was far beyond the margin for error. At the time, Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International, the two companies hired to do the polling for the National Election Pool (a consortium of the nation’s five major broadcasters and the Associated Press), didn’t provide an explanation for how this happened. They promised, however, that a full explanation would be forthcoming.

On Jan. 19, on the eve of the inauguration, Edison and Mitofsky released their report, “Evaluation of Edison/Mitofsky Election System 2004,” which generated headlines such as MSNBC’s “Exit Polls Prove That Bush Won.” But, the report does nothing of the sort. It restates a thesis that the pollsters previously intimated—that the discrepancy was “most likely due to Kerry voters participating in the exit polls at a higher rate than Bush voters.” But the body of the report offers no data to substantiate this position. In fact, data presented in the report serve to rebut the thesis, and bolster suspicions that the official vote count was way, way off.

The report states that the difference between exit polls and official tallies was far too great to be explained by chance (“sampling error”), and that a systematic bias is implicated.

With that statement the pollsters confirm the discrepancy we initially documented (www.appliedresearch.us/sf/epdiscrep). The exit polls were based on more than 70,000 confidential questionnaires completed by randomly selected voters as they exited the polling place. The overall margin of error should have been under 1 percent. But the official result deviated from the poll projections by more than 5 percent—a statistical impossibility.

The pollsters report that the precincts were appropriately chosen for sampling, in that the aggregated official results from the sampled precincts accurately reflected the official statewide ballot counts.

In saying this, Mitofsky and Edison vindicate a key piece of their methodology—the representativeness of their samples. If the fault

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Despite what you may have heard

indeed lies with the exit polls, the range of possibilities for error is therefore narrowed.

Finally, they report that the source of error is, in fact, within-precinct error (WPE), the difference between official precinct tallies and the exit poll samples *from those same precincts*. On average, across the country, the President did 6.5 percent better in the official vote count, relative to Kerry, than the exit polls projected.

This admission further narrows the range of possibilities. If the polling data are accurate, the only remaining possibilities are “non-response bias” (i.e., Bush voters disproportionately did not participate in the exit polls) and/or errors in the official tally.

However, having gotten to this point in their argument, Mitofsky and Edison summarily dismiss the possibility that the official count was wrong. They reject the election fraud hypothesis because, they say, “precincts with touch screen and optical voting have essentially the same error rates as those using punch-card systems.”

Indeed, they do. But this fact merely suggests that all three of these systems may have been corrupted. Indeed, there is little question about problems associated with both punch card systems (recall the Florida debacle in 2000) and mechanical voting machines, which are generally unreliable, vulnerable to tinkering and leave no paper trail. That’s why both systems have been slated for termination under the Helping America Vote Act of 2002.

Notably, Mitofsky and Edison unsuccessfully try to explain away the fact that, according to their data, only in precincts that used old-fashioned, hand-counted paper ballots did the official count and the exit polls fall within the normal sampling margin of error.

Further, data that are underplayed in the report provide support for the hypothesis that the election was stolen.

First, the report acknowledges that the discrepancy between the exit polls and the official count was considerably greater

in the critical swing states. And while that fact is consistent with allegations of fraud (if you are going to steal an election you go after votes most vigorously where they are most needed), Mitofsky and Edison suggest, without providing any data or theory to back up their claim, that this discrepancy is somehow related to media coverage.

Second, in light of the charges that the 2000 election was not legitimate, the Bush/Cheney campaign would have wanted to prevail in the popular vote. If fraud was afoot, it would make sense that the president’s men would steal votes in their strongholds, where the likelihood of detection is small. Lo and behold, the report provides data that strongly bolster this theory. In those precincts that went at least 80 percent for Bush, the average within-precinct-error (WPE) was a whopping 10.0—the numerical difference between the exit poll predictions and the official count. That means that in Bush strongholds, Kerry, on average, received only about two-thirds of the votes that exit polls predicted. In contrast, in Kerry strongholds, exit polls matched the official count almost exactly (an average WPE of 0.3).

Other report data undermine the argument that Kerry voters were more likely to complete the exit poll interview than Bush voters. If this were the case, then one would expect that in precincts where Kerry voters predominated, the cooperation rate would be higher than in pro-Bush precincts. But in fact, the data suggest that Bush voters were slightly more likely to complete the survey: 56 percent of voters completed the survey in the Bush strongholds, while 53 percent cooperated in Kerry strongholds.

Corollary evidence

The exit polls themselves are a strong indicator of a corrupted election. Moreover, the exit poll discrepancy must be interpreted in the context of more than 100,000 officially logged reports of irregularities during Election Day 2004. For many Americans, if

not most, mass-scale fraud in a U.S. presidential election is an unthinkable possibility. But taken together, the allegations, the subsequently documented irregularities, systematic vulnerabilities, and implausible numbers suggest a coherent story of fraud and deceit.

What’s more, the exit poll disparity doesn’t tell the whole story. It doesn’t count those voters who were disenfranchised before they even got to the polls. The voting machine shortages in Democratic districts, the fraudulent felony purges of voter rolls, the barriers to registration, and the unmailed, lost, or cavalierly rejected absentee ballots all represent distortions to the vote count above and beyond what is measured by the exit poll disparity. The exit polls, by design, sample only those voters who have already overcome these hurdles.

The thesis of the Mitofsky/Edison exit poll report and the headlines that it generated are curiously detached from the numbers in the report itself. Statisticians who have studied the exit polls find substantial evidence to support the thesis that the vote counts—not the exit polls—were inaccurate.

Apparently, the pollsters at Mitofsky and Edison have found it more expedient to provide an explanation unsupported by theory, data or precedent than to impugn the machinery of American democracy. Unfortunately, their patrons in the media find it correspondingly preferable to latch onto a non-confrontational thesis, however implausible, than to even suggest the possibility of foul play. ■

STEVE FREEMAN is on the faculty of the Center for Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches research methodology. Freeman’s research on the 2004 election will be published in a book—co-written with *In These Times* Editor Joel Bleifuss—by Seven Stories Press this spring. **JOSH MITTELDORF** teaches statistics at Temple University and is a volunteer at USCountVotes.org. A comprehensive analysis of the Edison/Mitofsky report has been posted at www.uscountvotes.org/ucvAnalysis/US/USCountVotes_Re_Mitofsky-Edison.pdf.

ED ELECTION

heard, the exit polls were right.

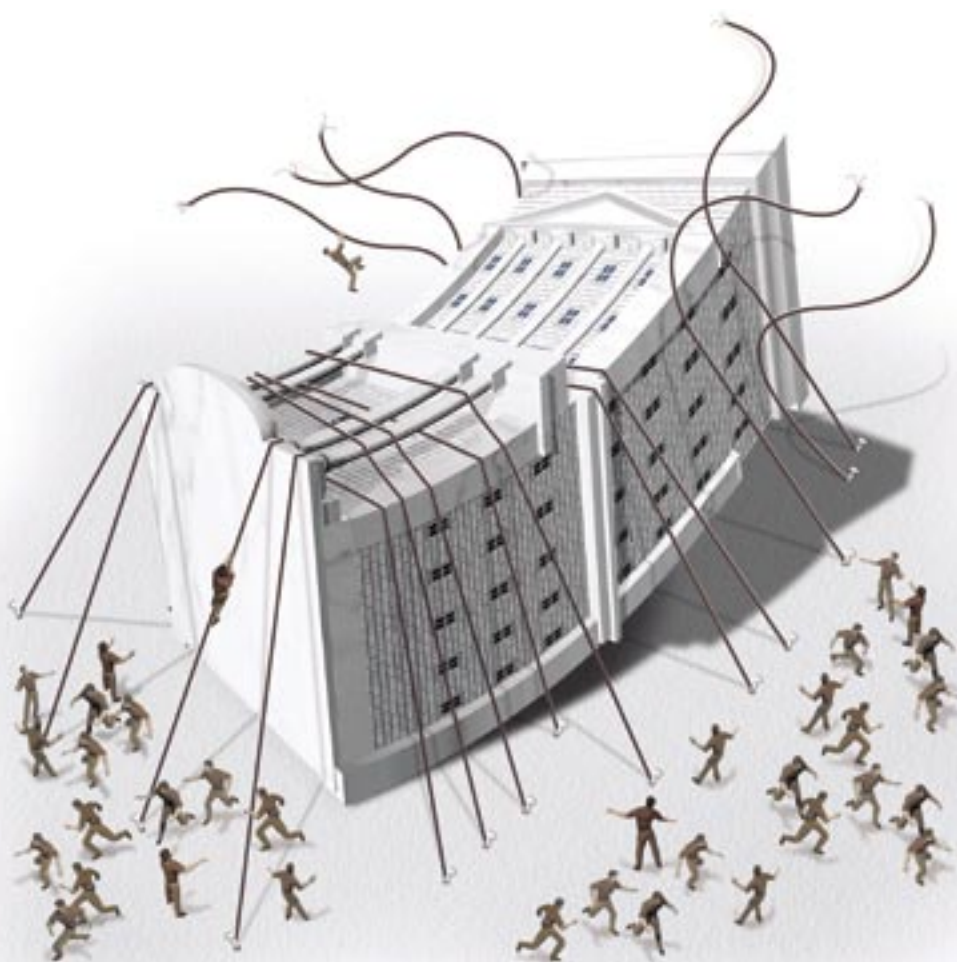
“The citizens
of the United
States must
effectively
control
the mighty
commercial
forces which
they have
themselves
called into
being.”

Teddy Roosevelt,
Speech to Union
Army Veterans,
Osawatomie,
Kansas, 1910

THE PEOPLE'S BUSINESS

CONTROLLING CORPORATIONS AND RESTORING DEMOCRACY

BY LEE DRUTMAN AND CHARLIE CRAY



MARCH 14, 2005

IN THESE TIMES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ONE DOES NOT HAVE TO LOOK FAR IN WASHINGTON these days to find evidence that government policy is being crafted with America's biggest corporations in mind.

For example, the Bush administration's 2006 budget cuts the enforcement budgets of almost all the major regulatory agencies. If the gutting of the ergonomics rule, power plant emissions standards and drug safety programs was not already enough evidence that OSHA, EPA and FDA are deeply compromised, the slashing of their enforcement budgets presents the possibility—indeed, probability—that these public agencies will become captives of the private corporations they are supposed to regulate.

This should come as no surprise to anybody familiar with the streams of corporate money that flowed into Bush campaign coffers (as well as the Kerry campaign and all races for the House and Senate) in the 2004 election. The old “follow the money” adage leads us to a democracy in thrall to giant corporations—a democracy that is a far cry from the government “of the people, by the people, and for the people” that Lincoln hailed at Gettysburg.

At a time when our democracy appears to be so thoroughly under the sway of large corporations, it is tempting to give up on politics. We must resist this temptation. Democracy offers the best solution to challenging corporate power. We must engage as citizens, not just as consumers or investors angling for a share of President Bush's “ownership society.”

The problem of corporate power

Unfortunately, the destructive power of large corporations today is not limited to the political sphere. The increasing domination of corporations over virtually every dimension of our lives—economic, political, cultural, even spiritual—poses a fundamental threat to the well-being of our society.

Corporations have fostered a polarization of wealth that has undermined our faith in a shared sense of prosperity. A corporate-driven consumer culture has led millions of Americans into personal debt, and alienated millions more by convincing them that the only path to happiness is through the purchase and consumption of ever-increasing quantities of material goods. The damage to the earth's life-supporting systems caused by the accelerating extraction of natural resources and the continued production, use, and disposal of life-threatening chemicals and greenhouse gases is huge and, in some respects, irreversible.

Today's giant corporations spend billions of dollars a year to project a positive, friendly and caring image, promoting themselves as “responsible citizens” and “good neighbors.” They have large marketing budgets and public relations experts skilled at neutralizing their critics and diverting attention from any controversy. By 2004, corporate advertising expenditures were expected to top \$250 billion, enough to bring the average American more than 2,000 commercial messages a day.

The problem of the corporation is at root one of design. Corporations are not structured to be benevolent institutions; they are structured to make money. In the pursuit of this one goal, they will freely cast aside concerns about the societies and ecological systems in which they operate.

When corporations reach the size that they have reached today, they begin to overwhelm the political institutions that can keep them in check, eroding key limitations on their destructive capacities. Internationally, of the 100 largest economies in the world, 51 are corporations and 49 are nations.

How Big Business got to be so big

Corporations in the United States began as quasi-government institutions, business organizations created by deliberate acts of state governments for distinct public purposes such as building canals or turnpikes. These corporations were limited in size and had only those rights and privileges directly written into their charters. As corporations grew bigger and more independent, their legal status changed them from creatures of the state to independent entities, from mere business organizations to “persons” with constitutional rights.

The last three decades have represented the most sustained pro-business period in U.S. history.

The corporate sector's game plan for fortifying its power in America was outlined in a memo written in August 1971 by soon-to-be Supreme Court Justice Lewis F. Powell Jr. at the behest of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The “Powell Memorandum,” drafted in response to rising popular skepticism about the role of big business and the unprecedented growth of consumer and environmental protection laws, was intended as a catalytic plan to spur big business into action. Powell argued that corporate leaders should single out the campuses, the courts and the media as key battlegrounds.

One of the most significant developments that followed Powell's memo was the formation of the Business Roundtable in 1972 by Frederick Borch of General Electric and John Harper of Alcoa. As author Ted Nace has explained, “The Business Roundtable ... functioned as a sort of senate for the corporate elite, allowing big business as a whole to set priorities and deploy its resources in a more effective way than ever before. ... The '70s saw the creation of institutions to support the corporate agenda, including foundations, think tanks, litigation centers, publications, and increasingly sophisticated public relations and lobbying agencies.”

For example, beer magnate Joseph Coors, moved by Powell's memo, donated a quarter of a million dollars to the Analysis and Research Association, the forerunner of the massive font of pro-business and conservative propaganda known today as the Heritage Foundation. Meanwhile, existing but tiny conservative think tanks, like the Hoover Institute and the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, grew dramatically in the '70s. Today, they are key players in the pro-business policy apparatus that dominates state and federal policymaking.

According to a 2004 study by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, between 1999 and 2001, 79 conservative foundations made more than \$252 million in grants to 350 “arch-conservative policy nonprofit organizations.” By contrast, the few timid foundations that have funded liberal causes often seem to act as a “drag anchor” on the progressive movement, moving from issue to issue like trust fund children with a serious case of attention-deficit disorder.

From analysis to action

The vast majority of people, when asked, believe that corporations have too much power and are too focused on making a profit. “Business has gained too much power over too many aspects of American life,” agreed 82 percent of respondents in a June 2000 *Business Week* poll, a year and a half before Enron's collapse. A 2004 Harris poll found that three-quarters of respondents said that the image of large corporations was either “not good” or “terrible.”

Corporations have achieved their dominant role in society through a complex power grab that spans the economic, political, legal and cultural spheres. Any attempt to challenge their power must take all these areas into account.

There is a great need to develop a domestic strategy for challenging corporate power in the United States, where 185 of the world's 500 largest corporations are headquartered. Although any efforts to challenge corporations are inevitably bound up in the global justice movement, there is much to do here in the United States that can have a profoundly important effect on the global situation.

By understanding the origin of the corporation as a creature of the state, we can better understand how we, as citizens with sovereignty over our government, ultimately can and must assert our right to hold corporations accountable. The task is to understand how we can begin to reestablish true citizen sovereignty in a country where corporations currently have almost all the power.

Developing the movement

To free our economy, culture and politics from the grip of giant corporations, we will have to develop a large, diverse and well-organized movement. But at what level should we focus our efforts: local, state, national or global? The answer, we believe, is a balance of all four.

Across the country, many local communities continue to organize in resistance to giant chain stores like Wal-Mart, predatory lenders, factory farms, private prisons, incinerators and landfills, the planting of genetically modified organisms, and nuclear power plants. Local communities are continuously organizing to strengthen local businesses, raise the living wage, resist predatory marketing in schools, cut off corporate welfare and protect essential services such as water from privatization. Local struggles are crucial for recruiting citizens to the broader struggle against corporate rule.

Unfortunately, examples of grassroots movements that have succeeded in placing structural restraints on corporations are not as common as they should be. One of the ways we can accelerate the process is by organizing a large-scale national network of state and local lawmakers who are interested in enacting policies that address specific issues or place broader restraints on corporate power.

Just as the corporations have the powerful American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) to distribute and support model legislation in the states, so we need our own networks to experiment with and advance different policies that can curb and limit corporate power. The National Caucus of Environmental Legislators—a low-budget coalition of state lawmakers established in 1996 in response to the Republican takeover of Congress and several state legislatures—is a model that could be used to introduce and advance innovative legislative ideas at the state level. The New Rules Project has also begun to analyze and compile information on these kinds of laws. Additionally, the U.S. PIRG network of state public interest research groups and the Center for Policy Alternatives have worked to promote model progressive legislation, as has the newly founded American Legislative Issue Campaign Exchange (ALICE).

Moving the movement

Despite their many strengths, many major movements of the past few decades (labor, environmental, consumer) have all suffered from internal fractures and a lack of connection to the broader society. The result is that they have been increasingly boxed into “special interest” roles, despite the fact that the policies they advocate generally benefit the vast majority of people.

Cognitive linguist George Lakoff puts it this way: “Coalitions with different interest-based messages for different voting blocks [are] without a general moral vision. Movements, on the other hand, are based on shared values, values that define who we are. They have a better chance of being broad-based and lasting. In short, progressives need to be thinking in terms of a broad-based progressive-values movement, not in terms of issue coalitions.”

If there is one group at the center of the struggle to challenge corporate power, it is organized labor. As a Century Foundation Task Force Report on the Future of Unions concluded, “Labor unions have been the single most important agent for social justice in the United States.”

Labor is at the forefront of efforts to challenge excessive CEO pay, corporate attempts to move their headquarters offshore to avoid paying their fair share of taxes, and the outsourcing of jobs. Labor also has played a leading role in opposing the war in Iraq and exposing war profiteers benefiting from Iraq reconstruction contracts.

As AFL-CIO President John Sweeney has written, unions need to start “building social movements that reach beyond the workplace into the entire community and offer working people beyond our ranks the opportunity to improve their lives and livelihood.” This is beginning to occur more frequently. Union locals and national labor support groups like Jobs With Justice have been a key force in building cross-town alliances around economic justice battles such as living wage campaigns and the new Fair Taxes for All campaign.

These union-led, cross-community alliances have in turn supported some of the strongest union organizing campaigns, including the nearly two-decades-old Justice for Janitors campaign that the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and its allies successfully organized in Los Angeles and other cities across the country.

Clearly, labor unions, along with community-based organizations and churches, will be central to the construction of lasting

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local coalitions that can serve as organizing clearinghouses to challenge corporate rule.

Constructing a new politics

To challenge corporate power we must also value and rebuild the public sphere, and draw clear lines of resistance against the expansion of corporate power, such as the current push by Bush to convert Social Security into individual investment accounts that will allow Wall Street to rake off billions of dollars in annual brokerage fees. Most importantly, we must work to change the rules instead of agreeing to play with a stacked deck.

In our hyper-commercialized culture, we spend far more time and energy thinking about what products we want to buy next instead of thinking about how we can change our local communities for the better, or affect the latest debates in Washington, D.C. or the state capitol. And when so much energy is spent on commercial and material pursuits instead of on collective and political pursuits, we begin to think of ourselves as consumers, not citizens, with little understanding of how or why we are so disempowered.

The restoration of democracy requires us to address the backstory behind this process of psychological colonization. It requires us to address the public policies and judicial doctrines that treat advertising as a public good—a tax-deductible business expense and a form of speech protected by the First Amendment. It's been so long since we have seriously addressed such fundamental questions that, as a result, the average American is now exposed to more than 100 commercial messages per waking hour. As of October 2003, there were 46,438 shopping malls in the United States, covering 5.8 billion square feet of space, or about 20.2 square feet for every man, woman and child in the United States. As economist Juliet Schor reports, "Americans spend three to four times as many hours a year shopping as their counterparts in Western European countries. Once a purely utilitarian chore, shopping has been elevated to the status of a national passion."

A consequence of the hyper-commercialization of our culture is that instead of organizing collectively, we often buy into the market-based ideology of individual choice and responsibility and assume that we can change the world by changing our personal habits of consumption. The politics of recycling offers a minor but telling example of how corporations manage to escape blame by utilizing the politics of personal responsibility. Although recycling is a decent habit, the message conveyed is that the onus for environmental sustainability largely rests upon the individual, and that the solutions to pollution are not to be found further upstream in the industrial system.

The personal choices we make are important. But we shouldn't assume that's the best we can do. We need to understand that it can't truly be a matter of choice until we get some more say in what our choices are. True power still resides in the ability to write, enforce and judge the laws of the land, no matter what the corporations and their personal-choice, market-centered view of the world instruct us to believe.

Rebuilding the public sphere

With increased corporate encroachment upon our schools and universities, our arts institutions, our houses of worship and even our elections, we are losing the independent institutions that once nurtured and developed the values and beliefs necessary to challenge the corporate worldview. These and other institutions and public assets should be considered valuable parts of a public "commons" of our collective heritage and therefore off limits to

Continued on page 28



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Beating the Boomers



Why Bush and Co. Are Racing to Cut Social Security

BY DAVE LINDORFF

SOcial Security, the New Deal program that has provided a basic level of economic support for the nation's elderly, disabled and orphaned for 70 years, is in grave danger—not from Baby Boomers' rising demands, but from a campaign of lies and fear-mongering, led by the president.

The truth? There is no Social Security crisis. None whatsoever.

Yet, in his State of the Union address, President Bush put the campaign to destroy Social Security—and its promise of security for the aged and disabled—front and center, claiming that the system founded in 1935 is headed for bankruptcy in 2042.

Like the mythical weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, this was a flat-out lie. First of all, even if the date were correct, all that would happen in 2042 would be that the trust fund used to pay out benefits to workers would be exhausted. Even then, current workers' taxes would continue to cover 73 percent of promised benefits to retirees.

More importantly, that 2042 projection by the increasingly politicized Social Security Administration was a conservative projection made a few years ago based upon unreasonably low estimates of future economic growth. It has already been pushed back by several years of good economic performance. In fact, the Congressional Budget Office and most independent economists say that the trust fund should enable the system to cover all benefits through at least 2052 and perhaps through 2080 and beyond. And here's something the president has not told people: If the cap on income subject to Social Security taxation—currently set at \$90,000 in wages—was eliminated so that all income was subject to the

IN THESE TIMES

tax, there would be no shortfall in the trust fund—not in 2042, not in 2075, never.

But the most crucial fact that the president and right-wing critics of Social Security have failed to mention is that, by 2045, nearly all of the Baby Boom generation will have already shuffled off this mortal coil, taking their oversized claims for benefits with them.

Retirement policies

Given that there is no crisis, why are the president, right-wing politicians and pundits, corporate leaders, business organizations—and the media—all calling for “reforms” to “save” the system? They understand that the Baby Boom generation, as it approaches retirement, poses a crisis—not for Social Security, but for their political agenda. They know that if they can effectively kill off the program before it becomes a core Boomer issue, it will be much harder to reestablish it.

Consider this: Just as there will be nearly twice as many elderly retirees collecting benefits when the wave of Americans born between 1945 and 1960 hits its retirement age peak (the first Boomers start retiring in 2011), there will also be twice as many elderly voters. While today’s seniors came of age listening to Perry Como in the politically

quiescent ’50s, tomorrow’s retirees will be people who listened to Bob Dylan and cut their political teeth on the civil rights and antiwar movements of the ’60s and ’70s.

In a few years, we can expect to see an unprecedentedly large senior lobby that knows how to organize, and how to take it to the streets and fight hard when its own interests are at stake. Once they near retirement, this powerful voting bloc will see Social Security

of the environment and about global warming. They’re worried about 2010 and the senior revolution that is around the corner.

Today, people over 65, as powerful an electoral bloc as they are, represent only 17 percent of the voting age population. By 2025, when the bulk of Baby Boomers will be in the 65–80 age bracket, retirees will represent 25 percent of the voting-age population, an increase of 45 percent in their relative voting power. If

Bush knows that if he can effectively kill off Social Security before it becomes a core Boomer issue, it will be much harder to reestablish it.

and Medicare as their number one political issue. If Social Security is already the “third rail” of electoral politics, not to be touched, in a few years, it will become the Molotov cocktail, exploding the political status quo.

Corporate America knows this. The people in the boardrooms and the conservative think tanks aren’t worried about 2042. They don’t think that long-term. If they did, they wouldn’t be so cavalier about the destruction

those aged 55 to 64 are added into the equation—a reasonable assumption, since people who reach 55 are starting to think about their retirement and tend to vote more in line with the interests of actual retirees—the elderly and near-elderly will represent 40 percent of the electorate.

The right talks ominously of a generational conflict between older retirees collecting pensions *Continued on page 29*



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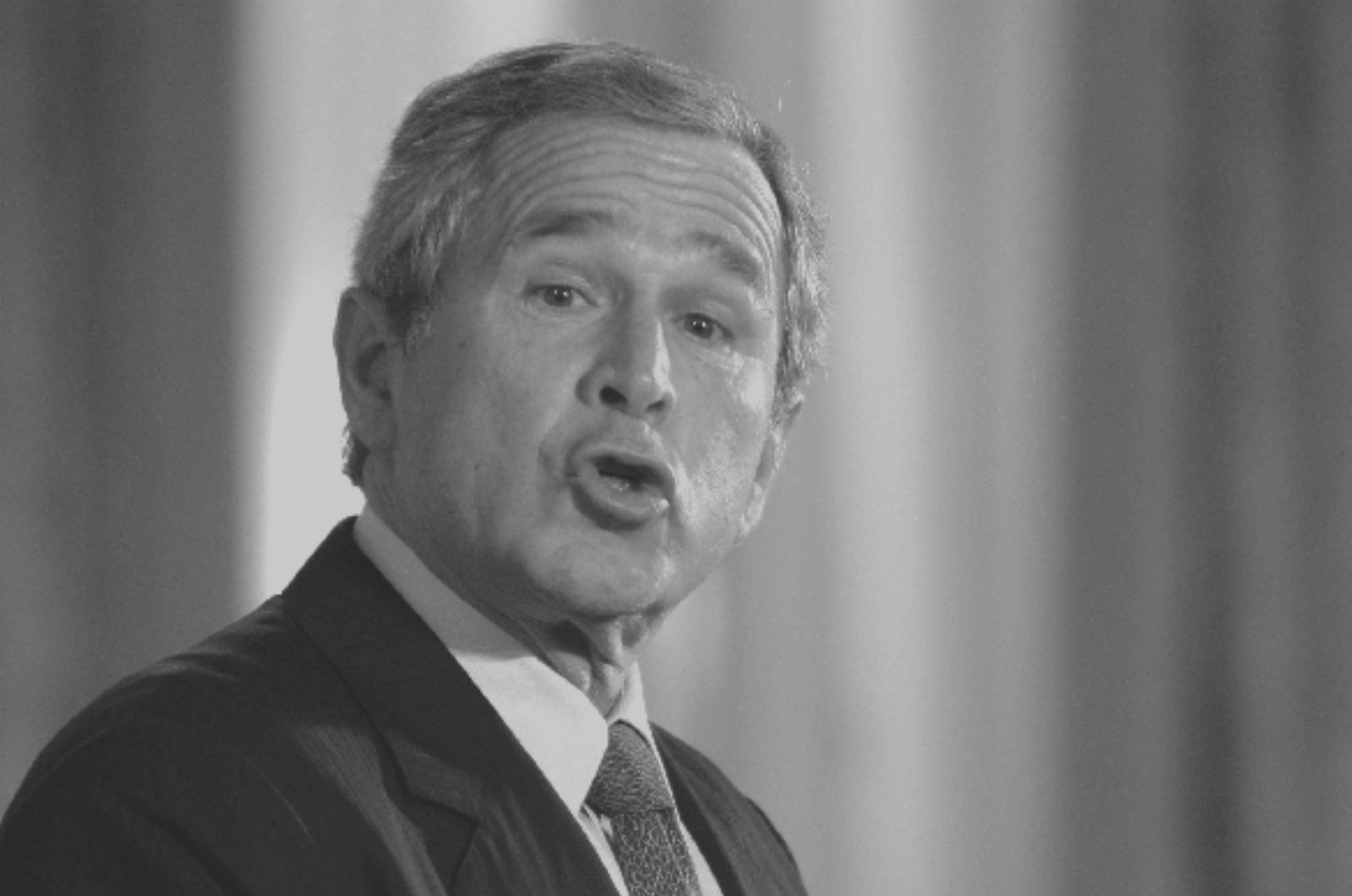
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The Not-So-Quiet American

BY SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

THE IRAQI ELECTIONS APPEAR TO authenticate the statement George W. Bush made in his January inauguration speech: “America will not pretend that jailed dissidents prefer their chains or that women welcome humiliation and servitude.”

It is difficult to disagree with Bush here: He effectively did touch the Achilles’ heel of many Western progressives, who were often disarmed by the one good argument, repeatedly evoked by Christopher Hitch-

ens, *for the war against Iraq*: The majority of Iraqis were Saddam’s victims, and they would be really glad to get rid of him. He was such a catastrophe for his country that an American occupation in whatever form would be preferable to them in terms of daily survival and much lower levels of fear. We are not talking here of “bringing Western democracy to Iraq,” but of simply getting rid of the nightmare called Saddam. To this majority, the caution expressed by Western liberals can only appear deeply

hypocritical—do they really care about how the Iraqi people feel?

Why, then, does the old story repeat itself in Iraq? America brings new hope and democracy to people, but instead of hailing the U.S. Army, the ungrateful people do not want it. They look the proverbial gift horse in the mouth, and America then responds like a sullen child in reaction to the ingratitude of those it selflessly helped.

With the global American ideological offensive, the fundamental insight of Graham

modesty nonetheless concealed, in the best totalitarian fashion, its very opposite.

Recall the standard claim of a totalitarian leader that he himself is nothing at all—his strength is only the strength of the people who stand behind him, he only expresses their deepest strivings. The catch, of course, is that those who oppose the leader do not only oppose him, but also oppose the deepest and noblest strivings of the people. And does the same not hold for Bush's claim? If freedom effectively were to be just America's gift to other nations, things would have been much easier—those opposing U.S. policy would be doing just that, opposing the policy of the United States as a single nation state. However, if freedom is God's gift to humanity (and—herein resides the hidden proviso—if the United States perceives itself as the chosen instrument for distributing this divine gift to all the nations of the world), then those who oppose U.S. policy are *eo ipso* rejecting the noblest gift of God to humanity. No wonder many authentic theologians are appalled by these kinds of statements from Bush, detecting in them a terrifying sacrilege. We therefore know now what “bringing democracy” means: The United States and its “willing partners” impose themselves as the ultimate judges who decide if a country is ripe for democracy.

Bush was again right in opposing the idea of exporting freedom, when he said: “Freedom, by its nature, must be chosen.” The hidden catch here is that precisely in the case of Iraq, this rule was violated. The choice was obviously a forced one, not only in the sense that freedom was imposed, but also in the sense that the allegedly benevolent imposer reserved for himself the right to define what freedom is. It is instructive to remember the case of Iran: not today's, but the Shah's. Did not Reza Pahlavi also want to impose Western modernization, with the paradoxical result of giving birth to a “fundamentalist” revolution? From this perspective, the “successful” elections did not change anything—the true test for the United States lies ahead. What if, sooner or later, the unfortunate Iraqis will “misuse” democracy and give majority rule, not necessarily to so-called “fundamentalists,” but to anti-Western and anti-Zionist pan-Arab nationalists?

When Bush celebrated the explosive and irrepressible thirst for freedom as a “fire in the minds of men,” the unintended irony was that he used a phrase from Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*. Dostoevsky used the phrase to describe the ruthless activity

of radical anarchists who burned a village: “The fire is in the minds of men, not on the roofs of houses.” Today, we already see—and smell—the smoke of this fire.

In her 1979 *Commentary* essay, “Dictators and Double Standards,” Jeanne Kirkpatrick elaborated the distinction between “authoritarian” and “totalitarian” regimes, which served to justify the U.S. policy of collaborating with rightist dictators, while treating Communist regimes much more harshly. Authoritarian dictators are pragmatic rulers who care about their power and wealth and are indifferent toward ideological issues, even if they pay lip service to some big cause; in contrast, totalitarian leaders are selfless fanatics who believe in their ideology and are ready to put everything at stake for their ideals. So while one can deal with authoritarian rulers who react rationally and predictably to material and military threats, totalitarian leaders are much more dangerous and have to be directly confronted.

The irony is that this distinction encapsulates perfectly what went wrong with the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Saddam was a corrupt authoritarian dictator striving for power and guided by brutal pragmatic considerations—a pragmatism that led him to collaborate with the United States throughout the '80s. The ultimate proof of this secular nature is the ironic fact that, in the Iraqi elections of October 2002, in which Saddam Hussein got a 100 percent endorsement (and thus outdid the best Stalinist results of 99.95 percent), the campaign song played again and again on all the state media was none other than Whitney Houston's “I Will Always Love You.” One of the outcomes of the U.S. intervention is that it generated a much more uncompromising “fundamentalist” opposition that precludes any pragmatic compromises.

Recall the old story about a worker suspected of stealing: Every evening, when he was leaving the factory, the wheelbarrow he was rolling in front of him was carefully inspected, but the guards could not find anything, it was always empty—until, finally, they got the point. What the worker was stealing were the wheelbarrows themselves. This is the trick that those who claim “but the world is nonetheless better off without Saddam!” are trying to pull on us: They forget to include in their calculation the effects of the military intervention against Saddam. Yes, the world is better without Saddam—but is it better if we also include in the overall picture the ideological and political effects of this very occupation? ■

Greene's *The Quiet American* is more relevant than ever: We witness the resurgence of the figure of the “quiet American,” a naive, benevolent agent who sincerely wants to bring democracy and Western freedom. It is just that his intentions totally misfire, or, as Greene put it: “I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused.”

The underlying presupposition is that under our skin, if we scratch the surface, we are all Americans. That is our true desire—all that is needed is just to give people a chance, liberate them from their imposed constraints and they will join us in our ideological dream. It's fitting that in February 2003 the right-wing journalist Stephen Schwartz used the phrase “capitalist revolution” to describe what Americans are now doing: exporting their revolution around the entire world. No wonder they moved from “containing” the enemy to a more aggressive stance.

It is the United States that is now, as the defunct USSR was decades ago, the subversive agent of a world revolution. When Bush said, “Freedom is not America's gift to the world, it is the almighty God's gift to every man and woman in the world,” his apparent



BY MARK ENGLER

No Better Place

“Our story is the story of our place,” says Hannah Coulter, the protagonist and namesake of Wendell Berry’s newest novel. It is a story of “how we married and came here, moved into this old house and made it livable again ... how we raised our

children here, and worked and hoped and paid the mortgage, and made a pretty good farm of a place that had been hard used and then almost forgotten; how we continued, making our life here day by day, after the children were gone; how we kept this place alive and plentiful, seeing it always as a place beyond the war.”

The place in question is a small acreage in the fictional farming community of Port William, Ky. The “we” is Hannah and her second husband, Nathan, whom she marries after her first spouse is lost in World War II. In a wider sense, however, “we” refers to the entire community that surrounds them—a group that Berry and his characters call the Port William “membership”—which shares in the labors, sorrows and joys of rural life.

Wendell Berry has staked his entire career as a novelist on this membership. With *Hannah Coulter* and with *That Distant Land*, a recently released volume

collecting 23 short stories about Port William’s inhabitants, he has wagered that understanding the ordinary details of their modest lives could be relevant—even urgent—in living our own.

Most who cherish the work of Wendell Berry think of him first as an essayist. With his nonfiction he has established himself as the nation’s preeminent defender of small farms, as a questioner of technology, and as an opponent of war and environmental exploitation. Admirers have dubbed him the “conscience of Kentucky.” He is also well known as a poet, with excerpts from his many volumes of verse showing up in places as unusual as an episode of “ER.”

But Berry, who turned 70 this past year, has also written seven novels. These, plus the now-collected stories, trace five generations of the Port William membership. Together they make the town into one of

the most intimately rendered communities in American literature since William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, Miss.

In simple, direct prose, *Hannah Coulter* progresses through its protagonist's impoverished upbringing, her marriages, her struggles in raising children, and her later trials tending an empty nest and mourning those who have passed. *That Distant Land*, meanwhile, chronicles happenings in the larger community. In both cases Berry presents stories free of artifice. ("Persons attempting to find a 'text' in this book," Berry warns in a prologue to an earlier Port William novel, "will be prosecuted.") Whether he is describing a

Hannah Coulter
By Wendell Berry
Shoemaker & Hoard
\$25, 208 pages

**That Distant Land:
The Collected Stories**
By Wendell Berry
Shoemaker & Hoard
\$26 (paper), 448 pages

turn-of-the-century hog killing, a Depression-era harvest crew bringing in the tobacco crop, or a '90s conversation between the widowed Hannah and a land-hungry strip-mall developer, the strength of Berry's fiction comes from his straightforward loyalty to his characters—to their speech, their convictions and their lifestyles.

"I am thinking of living right on, right here," a determined Hannah tells the glad-handing developer. His "anxiety ... almost panic" escalates when she capably adds that she has "given some thought to donating [her farm] as a wildlife preserve."

"Well!" is all he can muster in reply.

Port William lifestyles admittedly appear antiquated. Elderly residents' past love affairs, in particular, seem exceedingly innocent, moving from furtive

looks to marriage proposals with very few stops in between. Yet Berry loads the characters' glances with longing, so that even a romantically jaded reader is ready to cheer on the bashful farmers when they finally confess their intentions.

Berry's stories lack the dark undercurrent that runs through much of the literature of rural society, including Faulkner's. War touches Port William; it cuts short Hannah's first marriage and scars her second husband Nathan, a veteran whose sleep is haunted by the "blasted and burnt, bloodied and muddled and stinking battlegrounds of Okinawa." But in general, Port William has a deficit of meanness and vice. Most trouble comes from temporary lapses into insanity, sometimes alcohol-induced: A group of townspeople takes a bit too much pride in Kentucky moonshine and ends up putting on a raucous display in the governor's inaugural parade; a somewhat senile Port William elder takes a younger man on a harrowing—but ultimately harmless—ride down the wrong side of the interstate. Rather than lasting damage, these episodes tend to produce stories for the grandchildren to warmly remember.

Berry seems to share the attitude of his country lawyer, Wheeler Catlett. Though Wheeler has seen those who come to him reveal their "greed, arrogance ... cowardice, and sometimes inviolable stupidity," he has nevertheless "believed in their generosity, goodness, courage and intelligence."

The author saves his condemnation for those who look down upon country people from the perch of urban modernity. Berry's "membership" doubt that city-dwellers, for all their advanced gadgetry, have discovered anything truly worth knowing. One of Hannah's sons leaves the farm to pursue a degree in information and communications

technology, a topic far beyond his parents' frame of reference.

"Communication of *what*?" Nathan asks.

"God knows what," Hannah replies.

The political sensibility that emerges in the Port William tales is appealing both for environmentalists and progressives trying to reassert their own brand of moral fiber. It is deeply rooted in place and profoundly antagonistic to market values. "Everything about a place that's different from its price is a gift," says Wheeler Catlett, reflecting on the sale of a farm. "Everything about a man or woman that's different from their price is a gift."

Yet for all its virtue, Port William is dying. By the turn of the millennium, the Feltners, the Rowanberrys, the Penns and the Coulters are all but gone, and the family farms that were central to their lives are vanishing. Hannah, whose children have moved to the city, explains: "The old neighborliness has about gone from it now. ... People are living as if they think they are in a movie. They

are all looking in one direction, toward 'a better place.'"

We don't have to yearn to live in Berry's old-time community to take this as a challenge. Indicting the ideal of "a better place," his characters prod us to question whether, in our perpetual search for something more, we will ultimately be satisfied with any place, no matter how sophisticated.

And it is in grappling with this question that readers can appreciate Berry's decision to root his 50 years of fiction in a single locale, one that looks most ordinary and modest. With these two volumes he tells us that the tasks of making a house and caring for the land, of finding love and raising children, of sowing peace and honoring the dead are not just the mundane details of life. *They are* life. To require a more glamorous setting for fiction is to abandon the responsibilities of serious literature. For the novelist, too, there can be no better place. ■

MARK ENGLER, a writer based in New York City, can be reached at engler@democracyuprising.com.

ART SPACE



Urban Rain, acrylic on paper, by Jason Austin. He is one of more than 100 artists being exhibited through March 20 at the Richmond Art Center, Richmond, Calif. *The Art of Living Black 2005*, a Black History Month exhibition, is billed as the Ninth Annual Bay Area Black Artists Non-Juried Exhibition and Self-Guided Art Tour. See www.therichmondartcenter.org for schedule information.

BY PAUL MCLEARY

Republican Cage Match

During President Bush's first term, most fiscally conservative Republicans remained mum as the administration gorged itself on a protracted spending spree that would have horrified previous Republican

generations. But now that any concerns about his electability have been successfully dispatched, some of those same conservatives—including the diminished ranks of congressional moderates concerned about their own incumbencies in 2006—are beginning to push back.

But what's a movement without a leader? Christine Todd Whitman, fresh off her humiliating stint as EPA chief, looks to be making a run for this position with her new book, *It's My Party Too: The Battle for the Heart of the GOP and the Future of America*. Whitman pens a scathing indictment against the "social fundamentalists" and "extreme right" factions that have hijacked the party in recent years. "Moderate Republicans who have strayed from [the administration's] hard-line orthodoxy have been targeted by activists seeking to purge them from the party," she writes. Whitman would like to see a return to a more traditional conservatism that

It's My Party Too

By Christine Todd Whitman
Penguin
\$24.95, 256 pages

Winning the Future

By Newt Gingrich
Regnery
\$27.95, 272 pages

supports "fiscal restraint, reasonable and open discussion of social issues ... and a foreign policy which is engaged with the rest of the world."

Whitman warns the party that if they keep driving moderates out, they'll have a hard time holding on to their congressional majority when the next election cycle comes around. But how much weight does Whitman's threat carry? As this past election proved, Republicans don't seem to have much of a problem with the far right's agenda, or at least how this agenda has been packaged in vague notions of "heartland values," "security" and "freedom."

But along with Whitman,

those outnumbered holdouts in Congress have been making a bit of noise, too. Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) worked hard to cap the president's most recent tax cut at \$350 billion and has publicly supported the U.S. sale of inexpensive imported drugs. Meanwhile, the growing fight over Social Security has sparked a full-fledged revolt against the president's over-reaching policy goals. Rep. Jack Kingston (R-Ga.), a member of the GOP leadership, recently told the *Washington Post* that 15 to 20 House Republicans are dead set against the proposal, and others estimate the number to be closer to 40. In addition, Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), a prominent moderate who was almost knocked off by a far-right primary rival this past spring, is on record as strongly opposing the president's plan, as is longtime Sen. Lincoln Chafee (R-R.I.).

Even given this growing opposition—and the best efforts of those like Whitman—moderate Republicans remain a

minority in Congress, outnumbered 37 to 12 in the Senate and 178 to 53 in the House. As if this endangered species of conservative didn't have enough opposition, into the fray wades our old friend Newt Gingrich to deliver the death blow. His new book, *Winning the Future*, billed as a "21st Century Contract With America," is the counterweight to any hope progressives may have had for the immediate future of the Republican Party. Borrowing heavily from the far-right's playbook, he laments the absence of God in public life and the loss of the Orwellian-sounding "patriotic education" in our schools, all while trying to sell the president's "ownership society" as something other than the privatization of all public goods and services.

While the original Contract With America was a broad, ethically based policy initiative, Gingrich's new tome reads like a collection of soft-headed partisan agitprop that relies heavily on the "faith and family" meme. Most of it is typically groan-inducing, but when he closes the book with a 20-page "Walking Tour of God in D.C."—in which he catalogs every mention of religion etched on the capital's monuments—he officially jumps the shark. Cloaking his arguments in the angry rhetoric of the far right, Gingrich proves Whitman correct about the bankrupt state of the Republican Party while simultaneously pushing her ilk further to the party establishment's margins.

Fiscal or social moderates have not been completely shut out of the Republican Party—the fight over Social Security might invigorate this debate—but as of now, their rhetoric of reason is being drowned out by the shriller voices of the far right. ■

PAUL MCLEARY writes frequently for *In These Times*.



Dead Meadow's music has been called everything from stoner rock to psychedelic revivalism.

BY JAMES PARKER

Return of the Elves

Magic—or more precisely, the “magical”—was one of the first casualties of punk rock. As guitar solos contracted and song structures were shaved to a stump, with amazing speed we lost our dragons, our druids,

our talking trees—the whole seeping, twittering realm of the fantastic was suddenly banished, as if by a lobotomy. It survived, lurkily, in the lower realms of heavy metal and Goth, but no one would ever again fill a stadium by singing about Gollum, the evil one. Punk rock had killed the elves.

Or had it? Dead Meadow, a quartet from Washington, D.C., whose fourth studio album *Feathers* was released by Matador on Feb. 22, are on a mission back into the magical. Schooled in D.C.'s punk and post-punk scenes, singer-guitarist Jason Simon and bassist Steve Kille discovered, almost as soon as they began playing together, a shared attraction to a state of pre-punk awe. “We found ourselves trying to get back to the music that had blown our minds as kids,” says Kille.

“Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, the records your older brother played you.” A steady stream of literary intoxicants—J.R.R. Tolkien, H.P. Lovecraft—flowed into the music, and the sound of Dead Meadow was born: spacious, weighty, enthralling, an almost ritualized reenactment of the moment at which ’60s airy-fairyness nosedived into ’70s drug rock.

“From the heights of the town/ her handmaids will announce/ her undying presence within/ the seven-pillared house,” run the lyrics to “At Her Open Door.” “We’re definitely looking for that escapist feel,” says Kille. “You know, you’re 10 years old, sitting on a shag rug, dreaming about other worlds.” The creation of other worlds demands a grand sense of scale, of the highs and the lows. On *Feathers*, vintage psyche-

delia is earthed in a rugged blues-metal base, and titanic riffing suddenly softens to the opiated trudge of *Dark Side of the Moon*-era Pink Floyd.

In a happy irony, it was the DIY climate of D.C.'s famously intense punk scene that empowered these musicians to take the plunge, to telescope backward into the music of their dreams. “I think it’s just the nature of growing up in that area,” says Kille. “You feel like you can do it, follow your own vision.”

Not easily pigeonholed, Dead Meadow’s music has been called everything from stoner rock to psychedelic revivalism. “The labels don’t make much sense to me,” says Kille. “Are we a heavy band? Are we a melodic band? I think we’re a pop band that plays heavier songs, which is maybe

how Black Sabbath would have described themselves, before the whole idea of ‘heavy’ got so rigid and prefabricated.”

Dead Meadow’s capacity for unforced heaviness is indeed remarkable. There is no oppression in their volume. Their heaviest moments have a quality of subsidence, of something gentle yet enormous sleepily changing position. Nothing breaks the reverie. “You read an Edgar Allan Poe story,” says singer-guitarist Simon, “and it’s all about keeping a mood, maintaining a certain mood and holding it through every word and phrase. And in music, if you’re trying to match every note to a certain feeling it becomes almost like a raga. How can we hold this feeling through a whole song?”

Simon’s frail, drifting voice—like a less virtuosic Thom Yorke (of Radiohead)—is the emotional key to Dead Meadow, undercutting the epic strokes of his guitar with a sort of wonderstruck humanness. Simon is almost addicted to wonder—his list of favorite fantasy writers goes way beyond H.P. Lovecraft, into the less charted territory of Algernon Blackwood, William Hope Hodgson and the Londoner Arthur Machen, whose 1914 story, “The Bowmen,” was directly responsible for the World War I legend of the Angels Of Mons, in which archers from the age of Agincourt appeared over the battlefield and rained celestial arrows on the German army.

“These writers, to me, are just a celebration of pure imagination,” Simon says. “And it seems like the imagination is suffering these days—so many images coming at you, so shallow and so fast. We’re trying to create songs with some space in them, some imaginative space, to give people some room.” ■

JAMES PARKER lives in Boston and often writes for *Arthur magazine*.

People's Business

Continued from page 19

for-profit corporations.

"The idea of the commons helps us identify and describe the common values that lie beyond the marketplace," writes author David Bollier. "We can begin to develop a more textured appreciation for the importance of civic commitment, democratic norms, social equity, cultural and aesthetic concerns, and ecological needs. . . . A language of the commons also serves to restore humanistic, democratic concerns to their proper place in public policy-making. It insists that citizenship trumps ownership, that the democratic tradition be given an equal or superior footing vis-à-vis the economic categories of the market."

Corporations are not structured to be benevolent institutions; they are structured to make money.

Changing the rules

Much citizen organizing today focuses on influencing administrative, legislative and judicial processes that are set up to favor large corporations from the very start. Put simply, many of the rules are not fair, and until we can begin to collectively challenge this fundamental unfairness, we will continue to fight with one hand tied behind our backs. Instead of providing opportunities for people to organize collectively to demand real political solutions and start asking tough questions about how harmful policies become law in the first place, many community-based organizations seem content to merely clean up the mess left behind by failed economic policies and declining social services.

The most successful organizing happens when it is focused on specific demands. Two crucial reforms have great potential to aid the movement's ability to grow: fundamental campaign finance reform and media reform. Together, these could serve as a compelling foundation for a mass movement that challenges corporate power more broadly.

The movement for citizen-controlled elections, organized at the local level with support from national groups such as the Center for Voting and Democracy and Public Campaign, provides a useful framework for action for the broad spectrum of people who currently feel shut out of politics.

Media reform is also essential. With growing government secrecy and a corporate-

dominated two-party political system, the role of independent media is more critical than ever. As Bill Moyers suggested in his keynote address at the National Conference on Media Reform in 2003, "If free and independent journalism committed to telling the truth without fear or favor is suffocated, the oxygen goes out of democracy."

The media have always been and will continue to be the most important tool for communicating ideas and educating the public about ongoing problems. Thomas Paine wrote more than 200 years ago:

There is nothing that obtains so general an influence over the manners and morals of a people as the press; from *that* as from a fountain the streams of vice or virtue are poured forth over a nation."

History is replete with examples that show how critical the media's role has been in addressing the injustices of our society. For instance, many Progressive Era reforms came only in response to the investigative exposés of corporate abuses by muckraking journalists like Upton Sinclair and Ida Tarbell. Writing in popular magazines like *Collier's* and *McClure's*, these writers provided a powerful public challenge to the corruption of the Gilded Age.

Because of increased corporate consolidation of the media, coverage of all levels of government has been greatly reduced. When people are kept ignorant of what is happening in their communities, in their states, in Washington, D.C. and in the world, it becomes much easier for large corporations to overwhelm the political process and control the economy without citizens understanding what is happening. Though media reform is a complex subject, one approach bears mentioning—establishing and strengthening nonprofit media outlets.

The long-term vision

Though campaign finance reform and media reform offer useful starting points, ultimately, there is much more to be done. We need to get tough on corporate crime. We need to make sure markets are properly competitive by breaking up the giant corporate monopolies and oligarchies. We need to make corporations more accountable to all stakeholders and less focused on maximizing shareholder

profit above all. We need to stop allowing corporations to claim Bill of Rights protections to undermine citizen-enacted laws.

Ultimately, we need to restore the understanding that in a democracy the rights of citizens to govern themselves are more important than the rights of corporations to make money. Since their charters and licenses are granted by citizen governments, it should be up to the people to decide how corporations can serve the public good and what should be done when they don't. As Justices Byron White, William Brennan and Thurgood Marshall noted in 1978: "Corporations are artificial entities created by law for the purpose of furthering certain economic goals. . . . The State need not permit its own creation to consume it."

The people's business

The many constituencies concerned with the consequences of corporate power are indeed a diverse group, and although this diversity can be a source of strength, it also makes it difficult to clearly articulate a vision for the struggle. What principles, then, can unite us?

One abiding faith that almost all of us share is that of citizen democracy: that citizens should be able to decide how they wish to live through democratic processes and that big corporations should not be able to tell citizens how to live their lives and run their communities. The most effective way to control corporations will be to restore citizen democracy and to reclaim the once widely accepted principle that corporations are but creatures of the state, chartered under the premise that they will serve the public good, and entitled to only those rights and privileges granted by citizen-controlled governments. Only by doing so will we be able to create the just and sustainable economy that we seek, an economy driven by the values of human life and community and democracy instead of the current suicide economy driven only by the relentless pursuit of financial profit at any cost.

Therefore, we must work assiduously to challenge the dominant role of the corporation in our lives and in our politics. We must reestablish citizen sovereignty, and we must restore the corporations to their proper role as the servants of the people, not our masters. This is the people's business. ■

LEE DRUTMAN is the communications director of Citizen Works (www.citizenworks.org); and **CHARLIE CRAY** is the director of the Center for Corporate Policy (www.corporatepolicy.org). They are co-authors of *The People's Business: Controlling Corporations and Restoring Democracy* (Berrett-Koehler), from which this essay was adapted.

Beating Boomers

Continued from page 21

and younger workers paying the taxes to cover them. This is a ruse—a reflection of a panicky effort to destroy Social Security before the Baby Boomers realize where their real political interests lie. Not everyone has children, but everyone has parents. How many people complain about the size of their parents' Social Security checks? How many people want to have to be personally responsible for their elderly parents' financial well-being? Even among young workers, a secure and generous retirement system has considerable support, because people don't just vote their own interests; they vote their parents' and grandparents' interests too.

The right doesn't have much time on this issue. Somewhere in their mid-50s, people start to think seriously about retirement. Today's oldest Baby Boomers are just hitting that milestone now, and when they start to contemplate their retirement, the picture will not be pleasant. Property values—where many have placed their faith and their savings—are stagnating, not rising. Post-Enron, those 401(k) pensions that so excited the middle class a few years

ago have been treading water. Meanwhile, companies are whittling away pension programs as fast as they can, eliminating “defined benefit” plans that pay benefits based upon set formulas and replacing them with plans that pay based upon what employees contributed, and on how well the investment portfolio performed. According to the American Benefits Council, between 1985 and 2002, the number of companies in the U.S. offering defined benefit plans fell from 114,396 to just 32,321.

Time is ticking

Given the sorry state of the private safety net, it won't be long before a movement springs up among the new elderly and near elderly not just to “rescue” Social Security, but to radically transform it into a true retirement program. Tomorrow's senior lobby won't feel constrained by current law, which makes workers foot half the bill. (We're talking about their own kids, after all!) We can expect to see a push for more of the tax burden to be shifted onto employers. We can also expect to see future Congresses pressured into passing legislation that will remove the income cap on the Social Security tax, as well as make private pensions fully portable, so that employers can't pocket years of contributions every time

they let go workers before they are “vested.” A movement to expand Medicare from a niggardly program that only barely covers the medical care of the elderly to a full-fledged national healthcare program that covers everyone may also be in the cards.

That is a scary vision for corporations and the right, and it's why Bush is pushing to wreck the system now. The president's proposed “solution”—private accounts for younger workers—would not fix Social Security, because, again, there is no “problem” to fix. But by removing some contributions from the reserve fund, they would create problems. The huge costs of financing the transition to private accounts and the new fees those accounts incur, combined with the risks associated with private investments, will jeopardize benefits for current retirees and for younger workers. Separate retirement plans will also pit the young against the old, making it politically easier for a future Congress to continue slashing the remnants of Social Security.

It's time to see the president's attack for what it is: an attempt to destroy the most enduring legacy of the New Deal. ■

DAVID LINDORFF, a frequent contributor to *In These Times*, is the author of *This Can't Be Happening*.

Editors note: We asked Senior Editor Kurt Vonnegut if he would write the editorial on George W. Bush's State of the Union address. He declined, submitting instead this poem on the state of the Earth.

REQUIEM

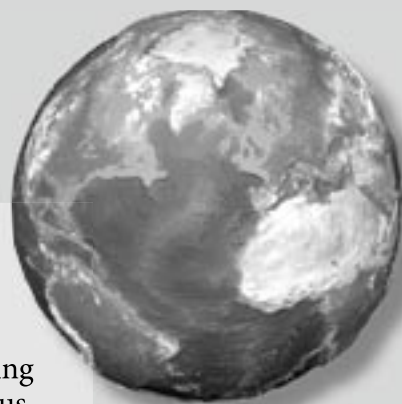
The crucified planet Earth,
should it find a voice
and a sense of irony,
might now well say
of our abuse of it,
“Forgive them, Father.
They know not what they do.”

The irony would be
that we know what
we are doing.

When the last living thing
has died on account of us,
how poetical it would be
if Earth could say,
in a voice floating up
perhaps from the floor
of the Grand Canyon,
“It is done.”

People did not like it here.

Kurt Vonnegut
February 4, 2005



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Radical Changes

Continued from back page

As I continued to tour, perform, write, question power and engage in critical culture, my contemporaries advised me: "Gómez-Peña, you should get a job in academia. It gives you medical insurance." I got depressed.

I experienced my mid-life crisis by going out with someone 17 years younger than me, a Mexico City upper-class princess. Our extreme differences in "lifestyle," politics and taste in art made me even more conscious of my age. One day, I realized I was definitely going through my *climaterio* when I found myself disco dancing in a Mexico City nightclub surrounded by 20-year-old hipsters. *Patético*. I excused myself, pretended to go to the restroom and escaped through the back door ... for good.

The symptoms of aging were cruel. When I was younger I had visions, utopian visions; after 40, I had dreams. As a young artist, the streets were my laboratory of experimentation; as a "mature" artist, conversations and rehearsals replaced the streets. I used to always collaborate; suddenly I was thinking more and more of my solo work and of my "personal voice." (Was I more selfish or merely wiser?) I became increasingly more conscious of my "artistic legacy," another anathema for a performance artist. But worse than anything, I became "tolerant" of political difference ... and very sentimental. I stopped having formidable intellectual fights with conservative critics. I started to cry at Mexican boleros. I even stopped getting naked on stage. (Clearly, I did this to protect my audience from my growing love handles.)

I also became aware of the fragility of my body. After a lifetime of abusing my body—partying and simply working very hard—one day I got gravely sick. I came face to face with Death. For eight months I faced the prospect of a life without touring, without performing; a life as a stationary intellectual forever meeting my inner demons in front of my laptop. I was insoluble. During my slow recovery I wrote my first script that dealt with my past—a biographical reflection on what it meant to be a rebel Latino artist facing the abyss of the 21st century and the dark clouds of middle age. I noticed that my poetic tone had changed. I was more ... somber and self-critical; less outrageous. I was thinking about my place in the world, my relationship to family, friends, art, community and

the universe at large. I had lost some of my sense of humor. That script was better literature, but denser and more enigmatic.

I eventually recuperated and went back on the road, thinking it all had been a temporary nightmare. But I was wrong, *pinche* wrong.

When I turned 45 my memory began to betray me. I suddenly started forgetting names, conversations, incidents, book and film titles. My recent memory, say, of the past three to seven years, was even worse. I first attributed it to Caribbean rum and tobacco, but then I started talking to other artists my age, and they were going through an identical experience. An Indian artist friend told me: "Don't worry *ese*, it's the Big Smoke. You are simply going through the Biliigg Smoke." My wise mother told me: "It's the German guy inside of you—Mr. Alzheimer. You have to start making peace with him." It wasn't funny. I began to consciously engage in memory exercises, in acceptance exercises. I became a Chicano Buddhist.

Now that I am approaching 50, I truly wonder if as an artist one can remain current, "hip" and connected to the world at this age, or if soon I should withdraw with dignity from the world, become a

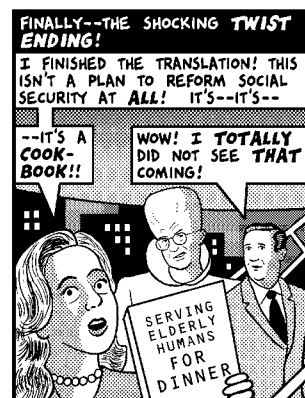
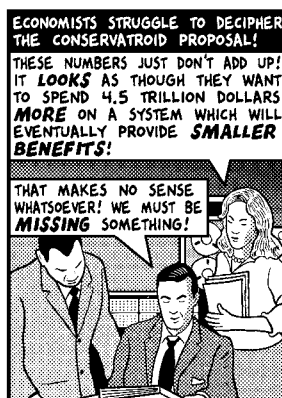
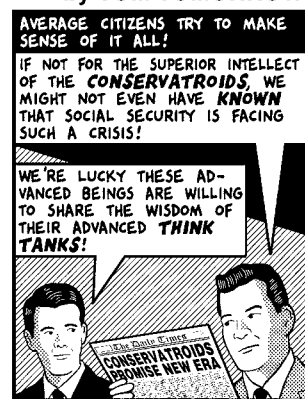
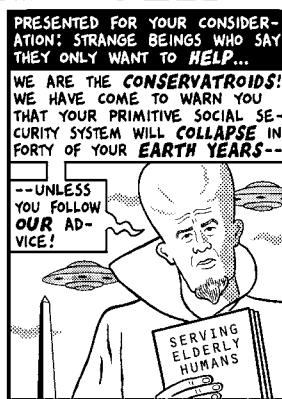
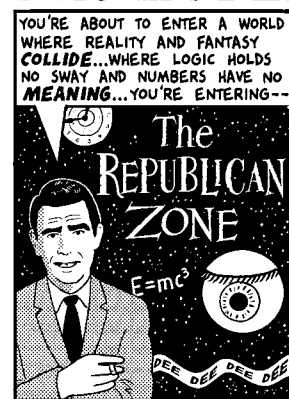
neighborhood drunk or commit ritual suicide as my last performance art piece. But when these thoughts begin to linger over my inner stage, my sense of humor and my love for life somehow redeem me once again. I think to myself: "Perhaps I can hang my weapons on the wall and still be a warrior," like my Colombian *brujo* told me ... or "perhaps I can become a hip elder loco artist like Duchamp or Burroughs ... or better yet, a sexy old *rockero* like Bowie or Jagger."

For the moment my only hope is to continue walking, not running, with a bit of style; to remain open-minded and tolerant; to consciously continue taking risks and opposing authority whenever I smell it; and to exorcise the future ... as much as I can. My only blessing is that Carolina, my wife, also 49, is still gorgeous, hilarious and as much a lunatic as she was when I met her eight years ago in New York City. ■

GUILLERMO GÓMEZ-PEÑA, a performance artist, writer and MacArthur fellow, is artistic director of San Francisco-based Pocha Nostra, a multidisciplinary arts organization for artists exploring issues of globalization, immigration, intercultural identity, border culture, the politics of language and new technologies (www.pochanostra.com).

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



Radical CHANGES

BY GUILLERMO
GÓMEZ-PEÑA

I just turned 49, which is quite dramatic if you consider that I am a much touted “radical” performance artist, meaning someone who is known for his transgressive aesthetics, political bravado and uncompromising irreverence. Suddenly, I am growing white hair and a belly, and my voice is reasonable and tempered.

A cruel curator friend of mine says that I am no longer feared or desired but “respected.”

Young artists are beginning to call me “Professor Gómez” or even worse, “maestro.” It flips me out.

I have spent a lifetime utilizing my body and my tongue as tools to express my opposition to mainstream culture, to advocate anti-authoritarian artistic practices, to promote alternative communities and support radical sexualities. And I always thought of myself as ageless. Or rather, as permanently young. To remain young for me implied a relentless capability to reinvent myself, to constantly take risks, and to remain in touch with the cultural and political pulse of the times and the streets.

It also meant not to think too much about the past or the future, to always operate in the “here” and the “now.” My existential motto was “If I don’t go mad at least once a week, I will lose my mind,” and I was loyal to it.

But one day I turned 40, and my rebel contemporaries and partners in crime began to settle down. They married. They bought homes. They got full-time jobs. They suddenly had much less time to hang out in seedy bars and undertake wild art projects. I saw them, one by one, losing their spunk and bravado, becoming cautious and moderate, talking about saving for the future (anathema for a radical artist), and dyeing their hair to hide the grey. It made me sad. I hung out more and more with younger artists who were willing to jump into the abyss with me. I even perceived a generational fault line between people of my generation and me.

Continued on page 31